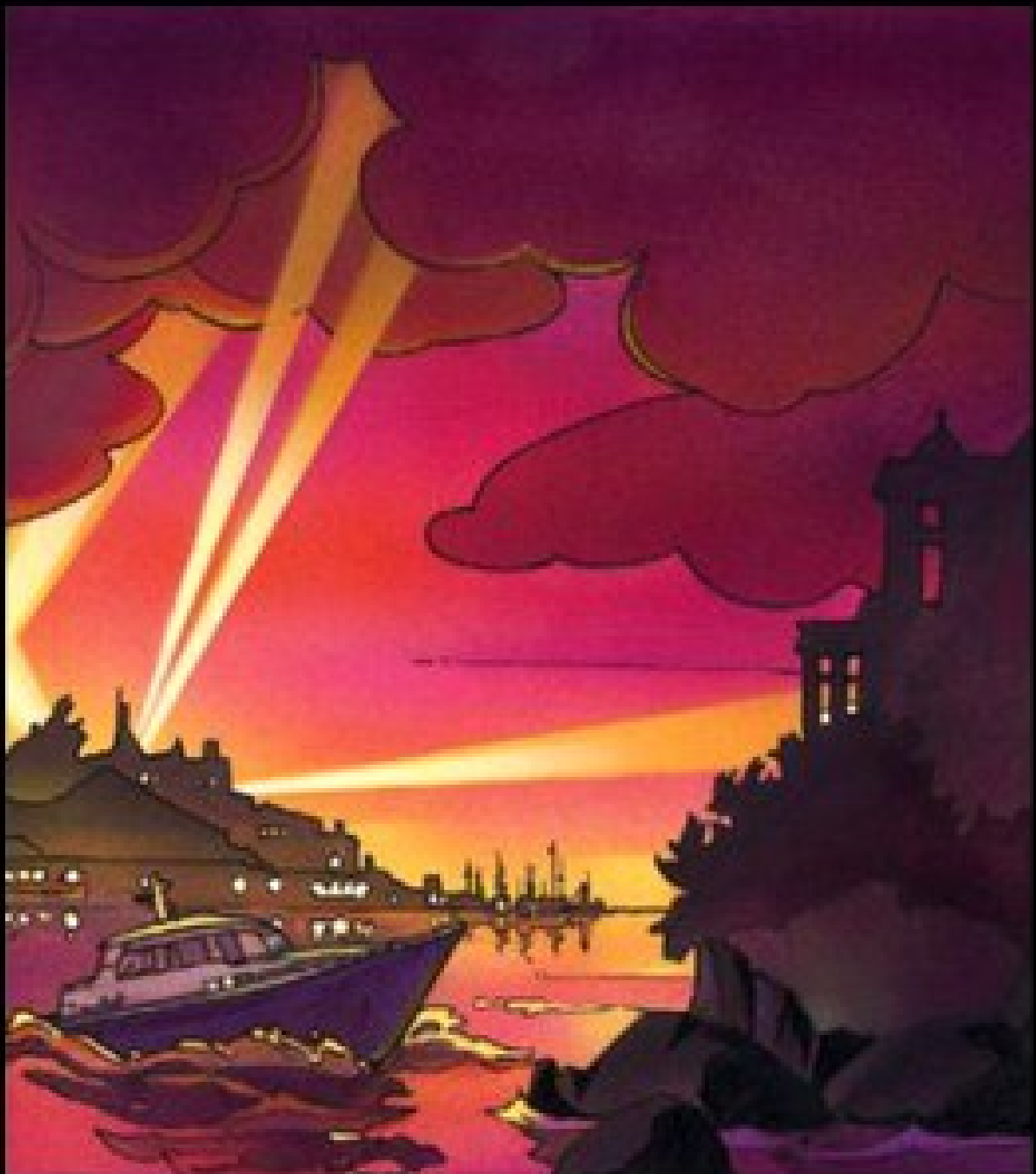


THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE SECRET OF FIRE MOON

PART III: THE NIGHT OF SHADOWS





in

**THE SECRET
OF
FIRE MOON**

Part III: The Night of Shadows

In the darkness of the night, The Three Investigators and all their adversaries searching for the mysterious painting *Fire Moon*, converge on a small island off Rocky Beach. One by one, they take on each other in a desperate attempt to get to the coveted painting first, as they only have a very short time to do so. Very soon, Jupiter discovers that there is more to just finding the painting, but to unravel the secrets that it carries—secrets that will cause a sensational reaction from the art world.

The Three Investigators
in
The Secret of Fire Moon
Part III: The Night of Shadows

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1. Ghost Town

It was spooky. The city was deserted. The residents of Rocky Beach had crept into their houses, only a few shadows moved here and there behind the candle-lit windows. The spotlights that had been set up for the light show stood abandoned in the streets. Now they looked like struck-down monsters. Apart from the whistling of the wind, there was no sound. The power outage had turned Rocky Beach into a ghost town.

"I still can't believe it," Bob said tonelessly as The Three Investigators stood in front of the police station—the only illuminated building around. "How could Hugenay have escaped? Inspector Cotta had assured us that it was impossible!"

"Cotta didn't know that the power would fail," Jupiter surmised. "Hugenay, however, did. He also knew when. All he had to do was to wait for the right moment in his cell and react quickly enough before the emergency generator could start and supply the electronic lock with electricity. The normal door lock should not have been a problem for him as a master thief, he probably got it open with a shoelace or something. The last hurdle were the guards, but they must have been sufficiently distracted by the spectacle that took place on the streets of Rocky Beach. Added to this was the sudden darkness, which gave Hugenay a clear advantage. He was probably long gone before anyone at the police station noticed that he was no longer sitting in his cell."

"But none of this was part of his plan, was it?" Bob wondered. "He didn't intentionally get himself arrested, did he?"

"No," Jupiter said. "Not even Mr Hugenay can think that far ahead. It was a happy coincidence. He knew that if the power went out, he could escape from the cell. He had something else planned for tonight,"

"The Knox Villa break-in," Bob said.

"Exactly. Since Mr Knox is a very rich man, I'm sure he has an excellent alarm system. But an alarm system works on electricity. And the island is so close to the coast, it probably draws its power from the mainland. This means that Knox Island, like everything else, is disabled at this moment. The alarm system there is not working."

"What are we going to do now," Pete asked and looked around searching as if the answer to his question was hidden somewhere nearby.

"First we'll call Inspector Cotta," Jupiter decided, pulled out his mobile phone and dialled the inspector's number. "After all, he and his men are already looking for Hugenay. Unfortunately, they don't know where to look. We do."

While Jupiter held the mobile phone to his ear, he looked into the darkness towards the coast. The sea could not be seen, and neither was Knox Island. The night was darker than it had been in a hundred years. It was the perfect conditions for a master thief.

There was a crack in the line, but there was no dial tone—not even after half a minute. Jupiter tried it again but without success. He dialled another number. Nothing happened. After half a dozen attempts, he gave up. "Damn! The network is completely overloaded. Probably half of California is trying to call on their mobile phones right now because the landlines are down... or maybe the mobile phone towers aren't working without electricity, I have no idea. In any case, there's no way to get through."

“Now what?” Bob asked. “There must be some way we can leave him a message!”

“We can,” Jupiter said, turned around and returned to the police station. Two minutes later, he was back with Bob and Pete. “I have informed the officer. He will tell Cotta what we know. The only question is when will the inspector show up here again. We can’t wait for him.”

“What do you suggest?” Pete asked.

“We know what Hugenay is up to. Probably his plan is not as sophisticated as it would have been if he hadn’t been in prison.” Jupiter was thinking hard. “Nevertheless, he will try to steal the painting tonight. And we must stop him. We have to get to the island!”

“Right now?” Pete cried, startled.

“No. Now we’re going back to the salvage yard first.”

The sight of the salvage yard without Headquarters dealt a blow to Jupiter again. The place where the trailer normally stood lay naked and bare under the lightless sky. The absence of Headquarters was like having their detective business robbed of its soul. It was as if they suddenly had no home anymore.

The anger about this, which Jupiter had already felt in the afternoon, returned with force. “This must end,” Jupiter said, more to himself than to his friends.

“Excuse me?” Bob asked.

“This must end... tonight. We’ve played along long enough. We have sacrificed time, energy, nerves and in the end even our headquarters, and yet Hugenay is pulling the strings again. That’s enough. Tonight we will fight back. Not only for master thieves is darkness the perfect cover, but also for master detectives. Hugenay will not achieve his goal, as sure as my name is Jupiter Jones!”

Pete looked at the First Investigator with concern. “You really scare me, Jupe.”

“Scare you? There is only one person who should be scared, Pete, and that is Victor Hugenay. Come on, let’s get to work!”

“What exactly are we doing here anyway?” Pete asked.

“Gather some equipment,” Jupe instructed. “Most of it is unfortunately inside Headquarters, but we’ll find three flashlights. See what else you can find. I have to do something.”

Jupiter disappeared into the storeroom where Uncle Titus kept his most valuable items, while Bob and Pete went to work. They knew the salvage yard so well that they had no trouble finding their way even in the dark.

A while later, Jupiter returned, with a bulging, rounded, and very heavy-looking backpack in his hand.

“What is that?” Pete asked curiously.

“I’ll tell you later,” Jupiter replied evasively and then he rummaged about busily in the open-air workshop. Bob and Pete gave each other meaningful looks as they had an idea what that was. With Jupe, they knew better not to probe too much.

In the end, they had collected three walkie-talkies, a pair of binoculars, three flashlights, a piece of rope and a roll of tape. Bob found his old pocket knife again, which he had been looking for months, and put it in the back of his trousers pocket.

Jupiter looked over to his house, where a lonely candle was flickering behind the living room window. He thought for a moment whether he should leave a message for his aunt and uncle, but then he decided against it. They had no time to lose.

The Three Investigators carried their equipment and left the salvage yard through Red Gate Rover.

It wasn't far to the harbour. Unlike in the streets of the city, there was a lot of activity here. The innumerable boats and ships that had been on the sea to watch the show from there were now gradually returning to the harbour. But because of the lack of light, everything moved slowly.

"We'll get completely lost in the crowd," Jupe noted. "All the better."

Now the Second Investigator took the lead. He was heading for a narrow wooden walkway. At its end was moored a small motorboat. "I don't know, Jupe, I don't have a very good feeling about this."

"Pete, I know you have doubts about borrowing Jeffrey's boat, or rather, his father's boat, just like that and taking it for a little spin. First of all, you even have a key to this boat, which requires a certain amount of trust on Jeffrey's part. And second, all the alternatives are too time-consuming. Every minute is precious. And the longer we stand here idly, the—"

"Yes, yes, all right," Pete fought back. "I just thought I'd say it again."

"Bob, take this into the record—Pete has doubts about the moral justifiability of the mission."

Bob laughed. "He's right, Jupe. But so are you. I think we should borrow Jeffrey's boat for this emergency. After all, we'll bring it back unscathed, right?"

Pete had already untied the ropes with which the boat was moored. Then he jumped aboard. "Well, what are you waiting for? Come on!"

Bob and Jupe climbed behind, stowed their backpacks under the bench and watched Pete get everything ready to go. He started the engine and steered the boat skilfully out of the small harbour basin.

In the meantime, most of the boats had disappeared from the open sea. The few that were still out there were heading for one of the nearby harbours. The Three Investigators were the only ones who were going in the opposite direction. As soon as they had left the boats behind them, Pete accelerated, and they left a white foaming trail in the black water, which slowly dissolved.

Bob looked back. He had often been on a boat off the coast of Rocky Beach, both in daylight and at night. But he had never seen the city like this before—as a completely black silhouette against a dark blue night sky, over which storm clouds chased. It was a ghostly sight, as if the city had been abandoned years ago. Even the headlights of the cars in the streets hardly changed this image. They looked like lost wandering ghosts.

A shiver ran through Bob. He turned around. Before them was only darkness. And somewhere in it lay Knox Island and the secret of *Fire Moon*.

2. Vendetta

Although the island was not far from the mainland, the journey seemed endless to The Three Investigators. But finally a contour emerged from the darkness. Knox Island towered before them like a punched out, frayed hole in the night sky.

"We are here, fellas," Jupiter said. "Stop the engine!"

With a last chug, the engine noise died down and the bow sank rushing into the salt water. A few seconds later, the boat was only gently bobbing up and down. The Three Investigators looked spellbound at the island. It was not much more than a large boulder in the ocean on which someone had built a house. The white walls of the villa glowed faintly. As there was no light behind any of the windows, Knox Villa looked as extinct as all of Rocky Beach.

"The building doesn't look that new," Pete remarked.

"It's not," Jupiter replied. "I read that Charles Knox found an old villa that he liked somewhere in northern California. But because his company is based here, he bought it and had it taken down piece by piece, transported to this island and rebuilt it here."

Bob nodded. "That was last year, I remember."

"But that must have been a huge effort!" Pete marvelled.

"It was. But Charles Knox is a multi-millionaire, what does he care?" Bob remarked.

Now a small jetty emerged from the darkness. It was deserted.

"We seem to be the only ones here," Bob remarked. "Neither the owner nor anyone else is here."

Pete frowned. "Maybe we were wrong. Maybe the blueprints for the villa had nothing to do with Hugenay's burglary plans... or the outage... or maybe the whole thing got too risky for him and he just took his chances and ran away."

Jupiter shook his head decidedly. "He is here... or he will come soon. We are only here first, but we will not be the only ones."

"So what do we do now?" Pete asked.

"I suggest a little round trip," replied Jupiter. "Perhaps Hugenay has disembarked elsewhere... but we should not make any noise. Are there oars somewhere?"

Pete nodded and rummaged around under the benches until he found two old, brittle wooden oars. Together with Bob he set to work. Calmly and evenly, they rowed in a wide arc around the island. Jupe kept a watchful eye, but nowhere was a boat moored. Knox Island seemed really deserted.

When they reached their starting point again ten minutes later, the First Investigator said: "Fine. Let's dock and explore the island!"

Pete and Bob took a quick look at each other.

"Isn't that a bit reckless, Jupe?" Bob asked. "What if someone else comes while we're on the island? Someone dangerous, I mean?"

"Bob, *Fire Moon* is on this island, and at least one person will try to steal the painting tonight. That's why we have to go to the island! We've been working on this case for weeks. Are we gonna give up right before the end?"

“Who says about giving up?” Pete said. “We could stand guard here and wait for Inspector Cotta.”

“Who knows when he’ll get our message?” Jupe argued. “And who knows if Hugenay is already on the island and the painting is stuck under his arm right now?”

“But we haven’t seen any boat,” Pete threw in. “He can’t be here.”

“It could have been hidden among the rocks without us seeing it. Hugenay could have had an accomplice who brought and left him here before going off. He could have come by helicopter... There are many possibilities.”

Bob sighed. “It’s really all about Hugenay, isn’t it?”

Jupiter frowned. “Of course it’s about Hugenay. What do you think?”

“I mean, you have absolutely no interest in saving a valuable painting. You just want to get back at Hugenay,” Bob said.

“I want a criminal who is wanted all over the world to be finally brought to justice, yes,” said Jupiter in a controlled manner.

“And is that really all? Is that all you care about?” Bob probed further.

“Care about what, for example?” Jupiter asked.

“For personal revenge,” Pete joined in the conversation. “A... what do you call it? ‘Venetta’?”

“The word you’re looking for is ‘vendetta’. It’s Italian for ‘vengeance’. And I think you’re getting a little ahead of yourself with that word, Pete,” Jupiter said. “Yes, it’s about Hugenay. I’m angry that he set us up so many times... that he used us. He’s the reason our headquarters is wrecked... and he should pay for it. I want to show him. Isn’t that what you wanted to hear? But does it make any difference?”

“Hold on there, Jupe,” Bob said calmly. “Let’s be reasonable here. Hugenay is not responsible for the wreckage of Headquarters. You are! You are the one who made the decision to resurrect the old lady. As Pete said earlier, it was a very, very, very stupid idea, and it has proven to be true. Look at this way, Jupe, you are just obsessed with getting even with Hugenay.”

“All I want is for him to end up in prison and for us to be left alone. What difference does it make what obsesses me?”

“It’s not just that,” Bob objected. “If you are not thinking straight, you get reckless—”

“I will not become reckless!” Jupiter interrupted him brusquely. “I never get reckless. Except when I compromise my cholesterol by eating too much cherry pie. Besides, I’m far from reckless.”

“I will hold you to your word,” Pete announced.

For a while, there was anxious silence among the three. Then Jupiter gave himself a jolt and continued more calmly: “Pete, Bob, I appreciate your concern. But we are currently in a situation where we have no time for deep psychological analysis. We have to do something. We have to do something now. And whatever we do, all three of us are not gonna be reckless, okay?”

Bob nodded slowly. “Okay.”

“Good. Now we’re going to disembark and check out this island. As a precaution we won’t use the jetty, but go ashore between the rocks and hide the boat.”

The Three Investigators paddled a little further until they found a suitable spot between two rocks. Pete tied the boat to a rock using a rope.

They climbed up to a fence made of new, smooth steel bars. They had already noticed the fence on their tour around the island. It was at least four metres high, led once around the whole island with no gap anywhere, and it made an extremely stable impression. They

walked along the fence back to the jetty. The jetty ended right in front of a gate—the only access to the villa. The gate was locked. There was a lock, but no keyhole.

“The lock seems to work electronically,” Pete remarked. “Just like that in a car. So I don’t think I would get very far with my lock picks... Perhaps we can go back now.”

“Pete!” Jupiter burst out.

“All right, I was just kidding. But what do you suggest? Should we climb the fence? It’s way too high. Even I can’t climb it.”

Jupiter frowned at the gate and the fence. Both were simple and effective. There were no ornaments or flourishes to hold on to, only smooth steel bars that ended in dangerous spikes. Beyond the gate was a small box that looked like a parking meter. “I’m sure that thing over there is some kind of console that you can open the gate manually.”

“Maybe, but it is absolutely unreachable from this side,” Pete remarked.

Jupiter didn’t seem to listen to him at all and muttered: “If only one of us could get to the other side, he could open...”

“Nobody’s going over,” Bob made clear. “Mr Knox is a very cautious man. He has made sure that absolutely nobody trespasses on his property.”

“Hmm,” Jupiter thought.

“Are you listening to me, Jupe?” Bob followed up. “I said no one can enter his property! By that, you can clearly see that no one is here! No boat, a locked gate, nothing to suggest that Hugenay is here. You must be mistaken.”

The First Investigator looked thoughtfully through the steel bars and at the dark terrain of the island. Was Bob right? Was there really nobody here? And perhaps no one would come? “Hand me the binoculars, Pete.”

The Second Investigator handed it to him. “What are you looking for, Jupe?”

“I want to see if Bob is right.” Jupe lifted the binoculars to his eyes and scanned the villa bit by bit.

“Well, you can’t see that much from here,” Pete remarked. “There’s nobody up there... otherwise you would see a light or something, wouldn’t you? I think—”

Suddenly Jupiter flinched. “There!” he shouted. “Up there! A figure!”

“What? Where?” Pete and Bob looked up, spellbound.

“Now he’s gone again,” Jupe said. “But there was someone at the window, I saw him clearly!”

“Are you sure, Jupe?” Bob asked.

“One hundred percent!” Jupe insisted. “He was only visible for a moment, but...”

“But what?” Pete asked.

“I think it was Hugenay!”

“He’s right here?” Pete swallowed. “Did he see us?”

“I don’t think so. But if we don’t do something, he’ll take the painting and escape.”

Jupiter looked at Bob and Pete very intensely. “We must stop him, fellas! Think! How do we get over that fence?”

Pete made a despondent face. “I... I have an idea... How we get in there, I mean.”

“What kind of idea? Out with it, Pete!” Bob said.

“I dare not,” Pete muttered.

Jupiter shook his head without understanding. “Why not?”

“Because this idea is... well... reckless... And we didn’t want to do anything reckless, remember? But I have a feeling you’re gonna like this idea anyway.”

Jupiter smiled. “This sounds promising.”

3. Flight in the Night

“If only I hadn’t said anything,” Pete murmured again and again two minutes later, while he rummaged around in the storage space under the foldable back seat of the motorboat. “I should have said nothing!”

“Pete,” Jupiter said appeasingly. “It’s not so bad! You’ve done this before, voluntarily... and it was completely harmless... Not only that, you loved it.”

“Yeah. It was all about having fun, not some totally insane break-in manoeuvre.”

“It’s not crazy. It’s a brilliant idea,” the First Investigator replied and helped Pete unfold the paraglider.

Meanwhile, Bob worked on the winch and screwed it to a mounting bracket on the boat. “What do we have to watch out for while you’re in the air?” he asked.

“Get up to speed,” Pete said. “You must not slow down until I am hovering over the area on the other side of the fence, or I will fall into the water. And you, Jupe, take care of the winch! You have to watch me up there as I have to wait for the wind to drive me in the right direction. Bob, you watch out for the rocks. Are you okay?”

“Sure,” Jupiter said and helped Pete to put on the harness to which the paraglider was attached.

After Pete was safely secured and everyone was at their posts, Jupiter handed the Second Investigator another walkie-talkie. “With this, we can communicate. As soon as you’re over there, put the paraglider down and open the gate at the console. Got it?”

Pete rolled his eyes. “It was my plan, Jupe, remember?” He tightened the straps and got into position. “You better step on it, Bob.”

Bob started the engine and steered the boat out into the open sea. Then he accelerated. The paraglider inflated and rose like a balloon into the air. Pete felt a jerk on his hips and a second later he was carried up. Jupiter began to crank wildly on the winch. Metre by metre, Pete rose into the sky. The wind was much stronger than on his last outing, and so he drifted to the side even at low altitude. At the same time, he continued to go up.

Pete did not feel half as happy and carefree as he did the last time. Instead of a wonderful view of the coast, he was only offered darkness, threatening water from which an eerie pull seemed to emanate. The coast was still an unlit, jagged strip on the horizon, nothing more. Pete shivered and turned his eyes towards the island. By now, he was at a height of ten or fifteen metres, and from this perspective, Knox Island seemed smaller than before. The villa was enthroned quietly and mightily on the black rock, but no matter how hard Pete tried, there was nothing suspicious to be seen behind the windows.

Pete looked down. All he could see of the boat was the trail of white spray and he heard the rattling of the engine. Pete switched on the walkie-talkie. “Second to first, come in.”

“First here,” Jupiter’s voice squawked from the walkie-talkie. “How are you doing up there?”

“Could be better. Somehow I’m not gaining altitude properly, the wind is too strong. But it should be enough height to get over the fence. But you have to give more rope, otherwise it won’t be enough to get to the other side. And have Bob make another turn so I can drift towards the island, because so far, there’s only water under me.”

“All right, we’ll do our best.”

The boat was moving further and further away from Pete and he felt that he was changing his direction of flight. Knox Island was slowly approaching. Finally, there was no more water underneath him, but hard, sharp rocks. Then Pete floated over the fence.

“Second to first... I’m on the other side now! You gotta slow down so that... woaaaaah!” A gust, which had turned into a strong updraught at the edge of the island, grabbed under the paraglider and lifted Pete up. As if in a lift, he shot up into the air as the island glided away beneath him.

Pete suddenly hovered almost directly over the motorboat. “Bob! Don’t slow down or I’ll just fall down on you! Just keep going in circles. I’ll be in the right position again sooner or later.”

The pull on the rope increased again. Pete let his eyes glide over the open sea. It was frightening how deserted everything seemed. The Los Angeles metropolitan area, where millions of people lived, was still shrouded in darkness, and all the boats had disappeared from the sea—all but one.

The Second Investigator frowned. Not far away, he saw a trail of white foam closing in on Knox Island. It was another motorboat! Quickly, he lifted the walkie-talkie to his mouth. “Jupe, somebody’s approaching.”

“Could you please be more specific, Pete?” Jupe replied.

“There’s a motorboat coming at you. Can you see it?”

“No, not yet. From where?”

“Well, from where? From the coast, of course! Bob should push a little and steer to the other side of the island so that we are not seen! Understood? Step on it! He’s pretty close.”

A moment later, Pete regretted his suggestion. When the boat made a tight turn to get out of sight, the rope lost its tension and the glider went into a rapid descent. The wind drove it back to the island. Faster than Pete would have liked, he hovered over the fence and the black rocky landscape and headed straight for the villa. The dirty white walls of the building came closer and closer.

“Stop!” Pete yelled into the walkie-talkie. No one answered. “Hello, Jupe? Come in!” Still it remained silent. Only then did Pete remember to press the talk button. “Jupe! Change course! Change course now!”

“What’s wrong, Pete?”

“I’m racing towards the house like a fly to the windscreen! Do something! I—” Pete yelled desperately into the walkie-talkie.

A strong gust of wind made the paraglider rattle and drove Pete even faster towards the front of the villa. At the same time, it went up until he was suddenly at the same level as the edge of the roof. Pete drew up his legs and floated over the edge. Then he had the dark slates of the roof under his feet. Pete ran over the only slightly sloped roof and tried to stop, but he was still pulled by the motorboat.

Suddenly there was a jerk and a clanging noise. The rope had got caught the roof tiles and was now tearing one shingle after the other from its anchoring as it scraped across the roof.

“Stop!” Pete yelled into the walkie-talkie. “Stop right now!”

The Second Investigator stumbled over a sloping slate which was then torn off by his feet. The walkie-talkie fell out of his hand, skidded directly to the edge of the roof, and fell off. The rope tore the thin shingles into pieces and pulled Pete further and further. In his desperate attempt to find a foothold somewhere, the Second Investigator got tangled up in the ropes of the paraglider. The glider collapsed like a soufflé and was suddenly nothing more

than a shred of fabric that Pete pulled behind him on his slide... on his slide directly towards the edge of the roof!

The Second Investigator was shocked. A short distance more and he would fall off the roof of a three-storey building! And the paraglider was completely tangled up and would no longer unfold. Pete frantically fiddled with the carabiner that connected his belt to the rope. But the pull on the rope was so strong that he couldn't get it loose.

Pete put his feet on the roof surface and let himself be pulled up again. Then he ran off, straight for the edge of the roof. As soon as he was faster than the boat below him on the water, the tension of the rope slackened. Hastily, he released the carabiner and threw it off like a ticking time bomb. Clattering, it hopped over the roof tiles and fell over the edge.

Pete stopped and leaned on his thighs, breathing heavily. Suddenly his knees became soft and he had to sit down. His heart was racing and he was bathed in sweat despite the cold. Exhausted, he closed his eyes.

After a while, Pete freed himself from the annoying belt and looked around. The paraglider had remained intact, but the lines were completely knotted. The wind, which was still pulling on the glider, made everything worse. Pete started to roll up the glider. A small, handy bundle would be less affected by the wind. Then he went back to the edge of the roof and looked down. The island lay deserted beneath him. Pete could only make out a narrow path that meandered between the black rocks and the lawns to the jetty. The rest was lost in the darkness. There was silence except for the whistling wind. Their motorboat could no longer be heard, nor could the other motorboat that Pete had seen.

What should he do now? The walkie-talkie was gone, and he had no other equipment on him. How would he contact Jupe and Bob? Could he even come down off that roof unharmed? Pete looked around and discovered a small hatch leading to the interior of the villa. But it was locked from the inside. No matter how much he shook it, he had no chance of opening it from the outside.

A deafening bang tore the Second Investigator from his efforts. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a brief flash of fire. Like the muzzle flash of a gun. Someone had shot something!

Pete got down flat on his stomach and stared strained into the darkness. Someone was there! A dark figure was tampering with the gate that had kept The Three Investigators outside the fence. Suddenly the gate swung to the side! Whoever was down there must have shot the lock open! The figure went through the gate and walked purposefully up the path to the villa.

"Bob! Stop, Bob!"

"What's wrong?"

"Pete says to stop the boat, now!"

Bob followed Jupiter's instructions while the First Investigator tried to locate Pete somewhere. He just saw the paraglider fell on the roof, but that was all he could see from here.

The engine was off by now, but the boat drifted a little further. Jupiter used the walkie-talkie. "Second, come in, second, come in! Come in!" Nothing happened. "Come in, second, come in."

Jupiter peered into the sky. Suddenly the rope that had been connected to Pete's belt clapped into the water.

"My goodness, the rope!" cried Bob. "Is Pete..." He didn't express the thought.

Jupiter cranked the winch. There was no resistance at all. A minute later, the carabiner hopped aboard, jingling. Jupiter looked at it for a moment. Then he said: "Pete is on the roof."

"What? On the roof? But... how do you know that?"

"I saw the glider. And a carabiner doesn't just come off by itself. Which means Pete must have released it so he wouldn't be pulled off the roof by the boat. So he's up there. Well done, Pete!" He pointed to the villa. Then he lifted the walkie-talkie to his mouth again and pressed the talk button. "First to second, come in." But there was still no answer.

"And what does that mean?" Bob asked.

Before Jupiter could answer, a shot rang out through the night. Bob and Jupiter turned together and looked around in panic.

"And what does that mean?" gasped Bob.

"Someone fired a shot," whispered Jupiter.

"I heard that! But it can only have come from the island! If Pete—"

"Stay calm, Bob!"

"Stay calm, sure, Jupe! What if someone shot at Pete?"

"This is a completely unfounded conjecture," Jupiter said and began to pinch his lower lip. "But we should nevertheless do something quickly."

"And what would that be?"

"We're going ashore again! Come on, Bob!"

Together they rowed the few metres back to the rocky island coast and hid their boat. Jupiter took his bulging rucksack, looked at it with a frown and then stuffed it back into the storage space under the back seat.

"Don't you want to take it with you?" Bob asked.

"Too bulky. Who knows what awaits us on the island. I don't want to carry too much ballast."

"But... aren't the contents of your backpack important?"

Jupiter didn't move a muscle. "Yes, but at least it'll be safe here. I can come back for it if needed. Oh, yeah, I guess we'll should also leave the boat's key here in case one of us needs to use the boat to get help or something. Now I'm just taking my flashlight with me."

He climbed off the boat and up the rocks to the metal fence. Bob followed him. They peered through the bars to the roof of the villa.

"Are you sure he's on the roof?" Bob asked and picked up the binoculars. "Well, I don't see him."

"Maybe he's on the other side," Jupiter thought and set off.

After a few minutes, they reached the jetty. It was no longer deserted. A black shimmering motorboat had docked. It looked fast and dangerous. Bob and Jupiter ducked behind a rock and watched the boat for a while. There was no one there.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" whispered Bob.

"Night Shadow?" Jupiter asked.

Bob nodded. "I know it's not very detective-like to infer from a black Corvette to a black motorboat... but it would kind of suit him."

"That too," Jupiter added, pointing to the ruined lock of the main gate. The traces of the bullet were clearly visible. "This would at least clarify the question of what was fired at, namely not at Pete."

Bob sighed in relief. "Thank goodness! But now what? Someone's fooling around with a gun! Whether it's Night Shadow or someone else—this is not good, Jupe! What should we do?"

“We could sabotage the motorboat and run away, but then—”

“Then Pete would be stuck here.”

“Right. And that’s why we’re gonna go in there and find him.” Before Bob could object, the First Investigator left their cover, ran to the gate and scurried through to the villa’s grounds. Bob quickly followed him.

Someone had obviously made great efforts to make the barren rock island more friendly. Wherever possible, bushes and shrubs had been planted and lawns had been laid. But the green had a hard time of it and was repeatedly broken up by boulders and stones that were scattered all over the island like the remains of a lost culture. In addition, there were almost a dozen huge spotlights that had been set up all over the area for the light show. But of course, the power outage had paralyzed everything here as well.

Jupe and Bob scurried from shadow to shadow as they moved towards the villa. The sound of the sea slowly faded.

“The grounds look just like on the blueprints Brittany brought us!” Jupiter whispered and pointed to the left. “There should be a garden house or something behind the small hill. That would be a good hiding place for now.”

Bob nodded. They crept on until they reached the building Jupiter was referring to. It wasn’t a garden house, but a small, windowless, ugly concrete cube, the appearance of which didn’t fit at all with the time-honoured villa. On the side facing the sea was a metal door. It was locked.

Jupiter and Bob took cover behind the small building and took a closer look at the villa for the first time.

It was built in an old-fashioned colonial style and had three storeys. A short, wide staircase led up to a spacious verandah lined with white columns. In front of the windows, there were open wooden shutters where the wind shook. Everything shimmered in ghostly grey and white. It really looked as if the villa had been enthroned in this place for over a hundred years. No one would have thought that over a year ago, it had stood hundreds of kilometres away in a completely different place.

“I don’t see anyone,” whispered Bob after staring silently at Knox Villa for a while.

“But I do,” Jupiter replied with a grin and pointed upwards. Pete had appeared at the edge of the roof and waved down to them, but immediately put his finger to his lips.

Jupiter waved back. “He seems fine. And he knows that we’re not alone on the island anymore.”

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness there’s nothing wrong with him. But what are we going to do now?”

“We’re getting Pete off the roof!”

“And how?”

“I studied the blueprints for a while yesterday,” replied Jupiter. “On the top floor, there is a hatch leading to the roof. Probably Pete can’t open it from the outside. But if we can get inside the villa, we can put Pete out of his misery.”

“What if we run into someone? Hugenay or Night Shadow?” asked Bob.

“We just have to be careful,” Jupiter replied and left the cover.

They hadn’t got very far when they suddenly heard a sound like the cracking of a branch. They both stopped in mid-movement and listened with a beating heart.

“What was that?” Bob whispered, not daring to turn to the sound.

“That,” said an unfamiliar, husky voice behind them, “is the sound of death.”

They spun around. A few metres away stood a tall man in a black coat and with black hair.

When Bob saw a gun pointing at them, he knew he was wrong about the sound. It wasn't the crack of a branch he had heard, but the sound of the safety catch of a gun... in Night Shadow's hand!

4. The Show is Over

“Who are you?” The man’s voice was cold, incisive and had a slight Spanish accent.
“Answer!”

“We—” Bob started, but was interrupted by Jupiter.

“We... we are... our names are... Jupiter and Bob Knox. Please don’t hurt us, sir, please!”

Bob threw a quick glance at the First Investigator. Jupiter seemed completely changed. His face had taken on a frightened and slightly stupid expression that was so convincing that even Bob thought for a moment that he was looking at a frightened and slightly stupid Jupiter. But, of course, that was not the case... Maybe a little frightened, yes, but really frightened? Never. Jupiter Jones was not frightened. Jupiter Knox, however, was.

“Knox?” asked Night Shadow. “Are you Charles Knox’s sons?”

“Uh, no, uh... his nephews,” replied Jupiter.

“What are you doing out here?”

“We... we heard a shot, and then we came out to check.”

The man nodded grimly. “And you’ve been on the island all this time, watching the light show, while your uncle is in town for the big gala celebration, I suppose?” Jupiter nodded so frantically that his hair fell down to his face.

“Well, the show is over. Let’s go!” He waved his gun.

“What... what are you doing, sir? Who are you? Where do you want us to go?”

“Forward, I said, boy! ... Go!” The man stepped forward and gave Jupiter a push. Bob followed along.

Night Shadow led the two detectives to the small building behind which they had sought cover just a few minutes ago. He rattled at the steel door, but it was locked. Without hesitating, the man took a step back, raised his gun, aimed at the lock and pulled the trigger. Bob and Jupiter jumped together in shock. The bang echoed in their ears as a high-pitched beep.

The bullet had blown the lock. Now the door could be opened easily. With a soft squeak, it swung open to the outside. It was completely dark inside.

“Get in,” growled Night Shadow gruffly. When Bob and Jupiter didn’t react immediately, he pushed them roughly through the door. Then he reached for a large spade that was standing in a corner.

“What... what are you going to do with us?” Jupiter stuttered mechanically. Not because he expected an insightful answer, but to maintain his cover.

“Shut up!” Night Shadow ruled over him and pushed him even further into the room.

Jupiter’s back hit against something hard. Without another word, Night Shadow left the small building and threw the door shut. Shortly afterwards, Bob and Jupiter heard a scraping sound.

“He put the spade under the door handle so we can’t push it down!” Bob said, startled.
“We’re trapped! What now, Juve?”

Jupiter did not answer. They waited until the footsteps outside the door had moved away. Then Jupiter reached into his waistband where his flashlight was. “We are not trapped. This

Mr Night Shadow may be dangerous and unscrupulous, but he is not particularly clever. He forgot to search us and take our flashlights. What a jerk.” Jupiter switched on his flashlight.

“Probably he didn’t think we could be dangerous in any way,” Bob said.

By the light of the flashlight, Jupiter’s grin looked diabolical. “That was also my intention. And now we should see how we can get out of here. There must be a way!” He shone across the room.

In the middle was a large machine to which thick cables were connected. The machine had a small chimney that led out of the roof of the building. Around it were some garden tools.

“What is this thing?” Bob asked.

“Hmm, looks like a generator—a device that generates electrical energy using a petrol-powered motor.”

“I know what a generator is,” Bob said, slightly annoyed.

“On the blueprints, some straight lines led from this building to the villa. I didn’t know what it meant until now, but it’s beginning to dawn on me.”

“Which is?”

“The lines represent electrical cables. This here is an emergency or backup generator that can power the villa even if the power supply from the mainland fails.”

“Oh,” Bob said, looking at the generator with interest for the first time. “Well, why don’t we have electricity then?”

“Because the generator is not running.”

“And why isn’t it running?”

“Because nobody turned it on.”

“But if you were to turn it on...”

“At least we would have the lights again. Maybe even the spotlights outside would come on. In any case, the alarm system would be reactivated... and that might drive Night Shadow away.”

Bob and Jupiter stared at each other silently for another second, then feverishly began to examine the generator. Jupiter had a bit of an idea about these things. Discarded generators lay around in the salvage yard from time to time, and the First Investigator had a knack for fixing such technical things.

“This is a petrol generator, it has more power than a diesel one,” he remarked.

“And how do you turn this thing on?”

“So.” Jupiter pushed a series of switches. But nothing happened. “I don’t understand,” murmured the First Investigator. “Actually, this thing should be on now!”

“Uh, Jupe...” Bob said and pointed out a small display they’d been missing. “This gauge here—it wouldn’t happen to show how much petrol is left in the tank, would it? And the fact that the generator won’t start, might it have something to do with this indicator being at zero?”

Jupiter stared stunned at Bob for seconds. Then he let his shoulders hang in frustration. “I’m afraid,” he said in a grave voice, “we’re stuck.”

Pete stared into the darkness and gnawed his thumbnail. Five minutes had passed since Night Shadow had led his friends to the small building and shortly after, he had disappeared somewhere.

Pete didn’t know where to go. And since he couldn’t see the entrance to the small building from the roof, he could only guess what had happened. Night Shadow had probably

locked Jupe and Bob there! He had to go to their aid. But there was a small problem—Pete didn't know how to come down from the roof. The roof hatch remained closed. And he might survive a jump from that height, but risk a few broken bones. Of course, there was still the paraglider. But no matter how he twisted and turned the lines, they had become so tangled up that Pete gave up trying.

Probably Night Shadow would come out of the villa in a few minutes with *Fire Moon* under his arm and leave the island as quickly as he had come... or perhaps Mr Hugenay might arrive. And there was nothing Pete could do about it.

But nothing like that happened.

Suddenly, the chugging of an engine tore the Second Investigator out of his brooding. It came from the sea. Was it a boat? Did Night Shadow leave the island? Or did someone arrive? Pete stared intently at the night. The sound grew louder before it stopped.

Shortly afterwards, he heard the creaking of the planks on the jetty. Someone stepped through the gate, but immediately disappeared into the shadows of the rocks on the side of the path. Pete couldn't make out who it was.

For a few seconds, he lost sight of the figure. Then it reappeared near the villa, and this time that was close enough.

Pete could not believe his eyes when he recognized the person. How was that possible?

The Second Investigator pulled himself together. He could think about the how and the why later, or better—leave that to Jupiter. Now he had to quickly think of what to do!

When the figure was close enough, Pete made a decision.

"I don't have a good feeling about this," Bob murmured softly into the darkness. They had turned the flashlights off to save the batteries. "What are we going to do? Pete is stuck on the roof, and even if he somehow gets down, he might run into Night Shadow just like us... or Hugenay."

Jupiter cleared his throat. "Not so much of Hugenay," he said softly.

"Huh? Why not?" Bob asked.

"Because... because Hugenay is not here."

"He's not here? But I thought you saw him upstairs in the window!" Bob was amazed.

"I... I didn't."

"Excuse me?"

"I haven't seen him," Jupe confessed. "It was a white lie."

Bob couldn't believe his ears. He turned the flashlight on again and shone it in Jupiter's face. "What are you saying?"

The First Investigator blinked at the light. "I did not see Hugenay. I only said that to get us to break-in here."

"Tell me, why are you doing this?" Bob demanded. "Why are you doing this to us?"

"Because I was afraid you'd want to turn back immediately."

Bob didn't know what to say. "Given the situation we're in, it wouldn't have been the worst idea either! If we had just stayed on board the boat, we could have waited calmly. We could have sabotaged Night Shadow's boat, then he would have been stuck here and everything would have been fine!"

"I know," Jupiter said guiltily. "It was a mistake. Could you please get that light out of my face, Bob? I feel like I'm in a police interrogation."

"I can't believe it! You lied to us, Jupe! What was that about?"

"I don't know either, Bob. It was just a spontaneous thought. I wanted to come into the villa. I wanted to find *Fire Moon*. I wanted to solve the mystery. I wanted to—"

"You wanted to beat Hugenay! That was the only reason, Jupe!" Bob burst out. "We were right about you all this while. You wanted to find the painting before he does."

"Of course I did!" Jupiter replied angrily. "So that he wouldn't steal it!"

"No, Jupe. Not only because of that," Bob said angrily. "You want to show him! And not just for revenge, as Pete had suspected earlier. But because you want to prove that you're smarter, faster and better than him! That's what this is all about. A competition... for recognition."

"He's been playing with us, Bob!" Jupe argued back. "All the time! It's about time somebody stopped him!"

"Somebody?" Bob remarked. "Not just anybody, Jupe. I know that you mean you."

"Yes, I mean I, damn it!" Jupe continued his argument. "He challenged me. He tricked me again and again. Now let him see what he gets out of this! I want to find the painting before he steals it. Is that so hard to understand?"

Bob shook his head. "With this, you will do exactly what Hugenay expects of you, Jupe. He wanted you to stay on the case while he was in prison. And why? So that you could get rid of Night Shadow... and Julianne. Why else would he put you on their trail? Hugenay recognized and exploited your greatest weakness, namely your ambition—just like last time. You want to beat Hugenay, Jupe, you want to show him, but you still play by his rules and you don't even realize it! And now we're trapped in here and can't do anything. Mission failed, I'd say." Bob turned off the flashlight and buried himself in darkness and silence.

The silence weighed on them like a tonne of weight. Jupiter felt terrible. Bob was right about everything.

"Bob," he began in a husky voice but was suddenly interrupted by a noise at the door. "There's someone out there," he whispered.

Outside, someone tampered with the spade that blocked the door handle.

"Pete?" Bob whispered hopefully.

The door opened and cold night air streamed in. But it was not Pete who had opened the door.

"I guess now you owe me a favour," said Brittany, grinning.

5. The Mouse Trap

“How did you get here?” Bob asked in astonishment.

Brittany put her finger on her lips. “I’ll give you the short version. I was watching the coverage of your beautiful little town’s 200th anniversary on TV, and suddenly the aerial view of Knox Island looked incredibly familiar. I was about to call you, but then the power went out. That’s when it dawned on me, so I drove to the coast, borrowed the motorboat from Miller’s parents and came here to prevent the worst. I was sneaking towards the villa when a little stone hit me on the head. Your friend Pete is sitting on the roof. Only the vulture knows how he got up there. He signalled to me to open the door of this small building. *Et voilà*, in the words of Monsieur Hugenay, here I am. Will someone please explain to me what is going on?

“Later,” the First Investigator decided and pushed outside. He looked up at the roof of the villa. Pete’s pale face peered over the edge of the roof. Jupe gave him a thumbs-up. Pete replied with the same gesture and grinned broadly. Then Jupe looked up at the villa. The large entrance door behind the verandah was open.

“He’s in there,” whispered the First Investigator.

“Who?” Brittany wanted to know.

“Night Shadow.”

“He’s here?” Brittany asked.

Jupiter nodded. “Since he has the same information as Mr Hugenay, he will probably use the opportunity to steal *Fire Moon* himself. He found us and locked us up. That means that he doesn’t expect us to escape so fast, so it shouldn’t be dangerous to enter the villa.”

Bob looked at him wide-eyed. “You want to go into the villa? Are you crazy? He’s in there!”

“Yes. And Pete’s up on the roof. If we can get to the skylight and free him, he can come down.”

“I’m not going in there,” Brittany decided.

“Whatever you say,” Jupiter replied and looked at Bob questioningly.

Bob nodded. “I’m coming with you.”

The two detectives ran off and reached the wooden stairs. Jupiter set one foot on the first step. Then on the second. The third step creaked softly. Jupiter took a big step over it and stood on the verandah in front of the yawning darkness of the open door. Bob followed suit. Then they entered Knox Villa.

It was pitch dark inside. The last bit of light that the night sky still revealed did not penetrate through doors and windows. But they did not dare to turn on the flashlights. Instead, they pressed themselves against a wall, held their breath and listened.

Somewhere in the villa, footsteps were rumbling on the floorboards. Night Shadow was stomping through like a hunter in search of his prey in a jungle.

A door was ripped open, the footsteps moved away, paused and returned. The door was slammed again.

“He is searching the rooms,” Bob whispered. “And I think he’s getting closer!”

“Yeah, I guess so. Look!” Jupe whispered back.

A light had appeared. It was the swinging beam of a flashlight that came through a door that was ajar. The light grew brighter with every thunderous step.

"I hope he doesn't come here!" whispered Bob.

"Certainly not. After all, he was already in this room. Why would he want to search it a second time?"

The steps came closer and closer. Suddenly, the man stopped right outside the door. Jupiter and Bob pressed themselves even closer to the wall and hardly dared to breathe.

Then a door creaked. Bob closed his eyes in fear, but immediately opened them again and stared over at the light.

It had not been the door to this room that had creaked, but another one. The footsteps receded and the beam of the flashlight became weaker.

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. "I thought he was coming in here."

"But he isn't," Jupiter replied, relieved. "Listen, now he's going up some stairs! He must have searched the ground floor. Now he's going for the first floor!"

"Jupe, the stairs creak awfully! We'll never get up to the skylight without that guy hearing us!"

"That's probably true," mumbled Jupiter. Then he switched on his flashlight.

"What are you gonna do?" Bob asked, startled.

"I just want to look around a little. While we're here, maybe we can find something that'll help us."

The room they were in was a kind of entrance hall. On the walls hung old-fashioned wallpaper in dark red. There were heavy flower pots on plaster pillars. The room was empty except for two velvet-covered chairs to the left and right of the door.

Jupiter looked around helplessly. His gaze remained fixed to the door frame. The First Investigator curiously took a step closer and illuminated the top of the door. "Do you see that?" he whispered.

"What?"

"There on the frame. There's a metal rail embedded in it."

Now Bob also came closer and narrowed his eyes.

"Looks like a cage. Strange. It doesn't go with the rest of the house."

Then Jupiter shone a light to the two small windows that led to the verandah on the left and right of the door. The strange metal rails were embedded at the top of the windows as well.

Jupiter frowned. "These things are all over the house—every door, every window."

"How sure are you?"

"Because they were marked on the blueprints. I already had a hunch what they might be. Now I have the proof."

Finally, he directed the flashlight's beam to the ceiling. There was a small, metal box.

"Are you gonna tell me what this is, or do I have to guess?"

The First Investigator grinned. "I'll tell you. What did you say before, Bob? Charles Knox seems like a very cautious man... I'm with you. Indeed he is. In fact, he's very afraid of burglars. That's why he's turned his villa into a mouse trap."

Bob didn't understand what Jupe meant. "A mouse trap? Where do you see a mouse trap?"

"There," Jupiter said and pointed to the small box on the ceiling. "And there." Now he shone to the metal rails. "There are grilles over the doors and windows that are embedded in the wall. And that thing on the ceiling is a motion detector. But if someone should enter the house without turning off the motion detector, in other words, if someone should break in, the

mouse trap is activated. Then the grilles in front of the windows and the door crash down. Charles Knox probably had them installed. The grilles will turn this house into a prison.”

Bob stared at the metal grilles, which immediately reminded him of animal cages. “Let me guess, Juve. All this would have worked when Night Shadow opened the gate or the front door if the island had electricity.”

“Exactly, Bob. Maybe the security system would have been activated when the gate was forcibly opened. In that case, the grilles would not have locked intruders in, but they would have locked them out. Victor Hugenay knew about this. He was aware that the island’s power had to be cut off in order to get into the villa.”

“The generator,” Bob said. “If it had petrol and if we could turn it on, the motion detector would work, the grilles would lock the doors and windows—”

“—And we could calmly help Pete descend from the roof while Night Shadow is trapped like a mouse,” Jupiter finished the sentence. His face was reddened with excitement. “And that’s exactly what we’ll do now!”

“But how? We don’t have petrol! If you’re thinking of tapping it from our motorboat, I’ve thought of that too. But it won’t work. It has a diesel engine, not a petrol engine.”

Jupiter raised his eyebrows appreciatively. “Very clever, Bob! Then you are only one tiny step away from getting a solution!”

Bob frowned. But before it occurred to him what Jupiter might mean, a deafening noise resounded directly above them! Bob and Jupiter flinched in shock and looked up at the ceiling. One floor above them, Night Shadow made an incredible racket.

“What’s he doing?” whispered Bob fearfully.

“He seems to have problems with a door,” Jupiter said. “All the better, then he’ll be busy for a while. Come on Bob, let’s get out of here.”

They left the villa, jumped down the wooden stairs into the grass and hurried back to the generator building where Brittany was waiting for them.

“Thank goodness, you are back! What happened? What’s all the noise in there? Did he spot you?”

“Fortunately not,” Jupiter replied. “But I’m sorry, Brittany, there’s still no time to explain. We must hurry. Come along!”

“But where are you going?” asked Bob, who still did not know what plan Jupiter was pursuing.

“Get petrol.”

“But I said we only have diesel, not petrol!”

“Not from our boat,” Jupiter said and turned to Bob with a smile. He felt a great relief when he realized that despite the mistakes he had made, he was slowly getting the situation under control again. “But Night Shadow’s. His motorboat is so sleek that it’s guaranteed not to be chugging along with just a paltry diesel engine. So we’ll just borrow the petrol from him!”

After minutes of anxious waiting, Pete was relieved when Bob and Jupiter left the villa unharmed.

Judging by the noise, Night Shadow was still busy inside the house, probably searching for the painting. He should be. As long as he didn’t get the idea of climbing on the roof, the Second Investigator was fine.

He had no idea what Jupiter, Bob and Brittany were planning when they suddenly set off towards the jetty. But the determination with which the First Investigator proceeded reassured

Pete immensely. Jupiter obviously had a plan. Nothing better could happen to them.

Suddenly the noise from inside the villa stopped. Instead, heavy steps rumbled. Pete had a dark premonition.

Jupiter, Bob and Brittany had just stepped through the gate when Night Shadow left the villa and marched down the narrow cobbled path with his coat blowing. Pete's heart beat faster. Jupiter and Bob had not yet noticed the man yet! And it could only be a matter of seconds before he noticed them! Pete had to do something!

Without thinking that he was giving up his cover, the Second Investigator quickly grabbed one of the broken slates lying around on the roof and hurled it into the depths. For a long moment, it sailed through the darkness, then it hit the paved path directly behind Night Shadow, crashing and shattering into a hundred fragments.

The man made a leap forward, ripped out his gun, spun around and aimed into the void. He frantically swung his gun left and right before he realized that there was no one there. Then he looked up.

Pete flinched. Too late? Had Night Shadow seen him? He did not know. And he didn't dare look down over the edge again. But from that position, he still had the gate and the jetty in view. Relieved, he registered that Jupiter, Bob and Brittany could not be seen. Probably, they had heard the crash and hopefully hid themselves well.

With his heart beating, he lay flat on his stomach for a moment, then he pushed himself bit by bit back to the edge of the roof and risked a look.

Night Shadow was no longer on the path. It took Pete a while to spot him in the dark. The man had turned around and was marching purposefully towards the small building where he had locked Bob and Jupiter!

The crash sent Jupiter, Bob and Brittany spinning around. Night Shadow! He was coming towards them!

Bob was the first to react. "Get out of here!" he hissed and pulled Jupiter and Brittany by the sleeve with him. As dark as it was, here on the jetty, they were in the spotlight. They ran along the outside of the fence to a group of rocks behind which they could hide. From here, they could see both the villa and the jetty, without being seen themselves.

"What was that?" whispered Brittany. "Did he shoot?"

Jupiter shook his head. "That didn't sound like a gunshot." He frowned. "More like something shattering... as if someone had thrown something from a great height. Pete! He must have seen Night Shadow from the roof and distracted him to save us!"

"Where is he now?" Bob asked and looked up at the villa strained. "Night Shadow, I mean."

"There he is," whispered Brittany, pointing to the hill behind the generator building.

"Oh no! He must have noticed we've escaped!"

"Damn it!" growled Jupiter. "We should have put the spade back under the door handle! Why didn't I think of that?"

"Now he's coming back out," Brittany said. "Now what?"

"He won't see us," Bob said.

"Yes, he probably won't," Jupiter agreed. "But what he will undoubtedly see is your boat, Brittany."

"Oh, damn!" Brittany gasped.

"You said it," Jupiter responded.

"So what do we do now?" Brittany asked.

“He has a gun. There’s nothing we can do. Just wait and hope for the best.”

Slowly Night Shadow came within earshot. The three were silent and watched the man. He hurried down the path, stepped through the gate and stopped abruptly when he saw Brittany’s motorboat. He muttered a few Spanish curses, then looked around. The three of them ducked even lower. Steps approached. The soles of Night Shadow’s shoes crunched on the rough rocks. Then he stopped, turned around and walked back in the other direction.

Jupiter and Bob breathed softly.

Finally, the man seemed to have come to the conclusion that no one was around. Quickly he went to his matt black motorboat, jumped on board and searched for something.

“Is he trying to run away?” whispered Bob. But his hope faded as quickly as it had come, for after only a few moments, Night Shadow was back. He had something big and heavy in his hand. As he climbed back onto the jetty, they recognized what he was holding—an axe!

Night Shadow walked straight over to Brittany’s boat. He jumped aboard, swung out with his axe and struck without hesitation. An ugly burst echoed across the water as the wood splintered.

Brittany winced. She pressed both hands to her mouth. Bob and Jupiter gave her warning looks.

Night Shadow lifted the axe a second time and struck again. And again. And again. The boat swayed under the attacks like a young tree in a storm. After a dozen blows, the man left the boat. With one last blow, he cut the rope that had been used to tie it to the jetty. Then he put the axe over his shoulder, brushed a strand of hair from his shiny, sweaty face and smiled contentedly as he watched his work.

With a soft gurgling, the boat sank into the night-black ocean. After the last air bubbles had risen to the surface, Night Shadow turned around and returned to Knox Villa.

6. Smashing and Crashing

Jupiter, Bob and Brittany hardly dared to breathe until Night Shadow was out of earshot.

“Oh, my goodness,” Brittany finally whispered. “That... that was Miller’s boat! He’s gonna kill me!”

“We’ll cry over the boat later, okay?” Jupiter said. “And Miller won’t kill you. Night Shadow would if we’re not careful. So, let’s go! Let’s put our plan into action!”

Jupiter waited until Night Shadow was out of sight and then climbed over the rocks back to the jetty.

“Just be careful, Jupe,” Bob warned when the First Investigator went on board Night Shadow’s boat. “That guy could come back at any moment.”

“That is precisely why we must hurry. Help me, Bob! Where’s the damn tank on this thing?”

It took them a while to find it. Bob unscrewed the lid. The smell of petrol got into his nose. “Now how are we gonna get this stuff out of there,” he asked at a loss. “Soak a handkerchief in the petrol and squeeze it out?”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “We need a canister or something. And a hose. That should do it. Come on, help me look.”

Brittany went on board and together they rummaged through the small cupboards and storage spaces.

“Where is your boat?” Brittany asked as she threw a few old, oil-smeared rags from a drawer onto the floor.

“We hid it a little further between the rocks,” replied Jupiter.

“Here’s a small canister!” Bob cried triumphantly and dug out a canister from under a bench. He shook it. “Seems empty.”

“Good. The hose thing could get really complicated, though. Bob, I think your idea about the handkerchief wasn’t so bad earlier.”

“Excuse me?”

“Here are some old rags. We dip them into the tank until they’re soaked with petrol and then wring the petrol out into the canister. It’s a very time-consuming but ultimately promising procedure.”

Bob rolled his eyes but then reached for the rags Jupiter was holding out to him.

“All right. You have to start, but we’ll keep looking for a hose, okay?” Jupiter said.

Bob got down to work. Every time he pulled the wet rags out of the tank, he gained just a few drops of petrol. The canister filled up infinitely slowly. Bob had the feeling that more than half of it either dripped outside the canister or evaporated. To make matters worse, the fumes clouded up his senses after only a short time. The petrol burned on his skin and made his hands brittle and cracked.

The canister was only a tenth full when Brittany suddenly appeared next to him and hissed: “He’s coming back! Hurry!”

For a moment, Jupiter interrupted his search. Bob screwed the lid onto the canister with flying fingers and closed the tank. Both jumped off the boat in no time at all and ran crouched back to their rock hiding place. Only then did they look around.

“Where is he?” Jupiter asked. “I don’t see him!”

“He was just there,” Brittany whispered. “He came out of the villa and walked down the path, but then he must have turned off somewhere. He could reappear at any moment!”

“How much petrol did you get, Bob?” Jupiter asked. Bob shook the canister, in which it only splashed softly.

“Not particularly much,” Bob said. “Shall we go back again?”

Jupiter pondered for a moment, but then shook his head. “Too dangerous. The generator should definitely start and run for a few minutes. That’s certainly enough to activate the mouse trap! Come on!”

They looked around to see if Night Shadow was really not around, then they hurried off, back towards the generator building, with Jupiter leading, followed by Bob.

They didn’t get far. Suddenly, something rustled near them. Immediately, the three of them stopped. Bob threw an alarmed look at Jupiter and they took cover again.

“There was something, wasn’t it?” whispered Bob.

Jupiter and Brittany nodded.

“There!” Brittany pointed to the right. “Something moved!”

“Maybe it was just an animal,” Jupiter suggested.

“That wasn’t an animal,” Brittany said. “There was someone walking among the rocks, I saw it clearly!”

Even before anyone could reply, they heard a loud crash from the villa. The sound was familiar. They had heard it only a few minutes before. It sounded like wood being smashed with an axe.

“My goodness, he’s chopping down half the villa,” breathed Bob. “But if Night Shadow is still in the house, then who’s out here sneaking around?”

Jupiter and Bob looked at Brittany.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Brittany gasped.

“Bob and I didn’t see anyone,” Jupe said.

“Do you think I made it up? There really was someone there! You still don’t trust me, do you? My goodness, what more can I do to prove that I’m not lying to you?”

Jupiter stared into the darkness and made a decision. “I’ll go and see!”

“Alone?” Bob asked, startled.

“Yes. You two, you’ll take care of the generator. Get it running. You know how to do that, Bob.”

“But if you get caught?” Bob asked.

“I can take care of myself. I’ll meet you at the generator building.” Jupiter crouched and went off. A moment later, he was submerged in darkness.

Bob looked at Jupe with concern before turning to Brittany. “Here we go!” He reached for the canister and hurried up the hill.

They reached the generator building unnoticed. Still the smashing and crashing sound boomed from the villa. Night Shadow was busy. Good.

Bob opened the door and entered the generator building. “Close the door, Brittany, I need to use the flashlight!”

“Wouldn’t it be better if I were outside... what do you detectives call keeping a lookout?”

“All right. That’s a good idea. Hopefully I won’t be long.” Bob closed the door from the inside, put his backpack down and turned on the flashlight.

It took Bob a while to find the filler neck for the petrol. He was about to take the lid off the canister when he suddenly heard a noise. It sounded like a thud, followed by a muffled

scream.

Brittany!

Bob put down the canister, turned off the flashlight and listened. Weren't there footsteps on the grass? But the more he tried to listen, the louder he heard only his own heart pounding. What should he do now?

Bob waited a moment, then pushed the handle down bit by bit and opened the door a crack. There was nothing there.

"Brittany!" he whispered, barely audible. No answer. Bob waited two or three more heartbeats, then took a step outside. He looked around. Nothing was moving. Brittany was gone. He crept to the corner and looked down at the jetty. There was nothing there, either. Then he looked up at the roof. Pete was crouched there. But Bob couldn't make out the Second Investigator's face in the dark. He tried to ask him by gestures if he had seen anything, but Pete didn't understand.

Bob returned to the door. He had just disappeared from Pete's field of vision when he suddenly heard quick steps right behind him. Before Bob could turn around, something whizzed through the air and hit him in the back of the head. Bob dropped to his knees.

Colourful stars danced before his eyes. He moaned in pain and felt the wave of fainting rolling towards him, but he fought it. Then suddenly, from behind, a hand was placed in front of his mouth and nose. It held a soft damp cloth. Bob inhaled the pungent smell of solvent and something else. And then his senses vanished.

7. By the Light of the Moon

It rustled. It cracked. But every time Jupiter looked around or hurried in the appropriate direction, there was either nothing at all or a mouse just scurried into a crevice. He had been wandering around here for five minutes now without having seen a soul. He had reached the other side of the island, from which only the back of the villa was visible and nothing else. Jupiter decided to go all the way around the island and then return to Bob and Brittany.

Jupiter found no one. He thought Brittany had mistaken. Or had she lied? On the other hand, if someone had hidden among the rocks or bushes, Jupiter could have walked past them at a distance of a few metres without noticing him. It was simply too dark!

Jupiter was running towards the villa when suddenly he heard glass smashing. The sound came from the villa. Just before he reached the entrance, the door flew open and Night Shadow rushed out, still holding the axe. He looked around wildly.

Jupiter ducked and ran to one of the big spotlights to hide behind it. But it was too late. Night Shadow had seen him! With quick steps, he marched over the verandah and jumped over the wooden railing into the grass.

Jupiter ran off.

It was exasperating. The lines, which were attached to the paraglider, had become so tangled up that Pete knew neither in nor out. When he thought he had untangled one knot, another one would pull tight. But he had to make this glider work again! There was no other way to leave the roof. And he had to get down and as fast as possible!

He couldn't see Bob or Brittany. They just didn't come out of that small building... or were they not inside? Pete cursed that he couldn't see the entrance from here. But something had happened, he was sure of it. They'd been gone too long. He had to do something.

Ah, finally—a line was free. With nimble fingers, he set about the remaining dozen. The wind didn't exactly make his work any easier. He kept getting caught in the paraglider and tearing at it, even though Pete had only unfolded it as far as was necessary to untangle the lines.

Suddenly, he heard a loud rumble. Pete interrupted his work for a moment, crawled back to the edge of the roof and peered down. Night Shadow had reappeared! Determined, he ran away from the villa between the rocks. Then the Second Investigator saw where the man was heading.

He was going after Jupiter! The First Investigator was fleeing into the darkness. Pete had to do something! Quick! He returned to the glider. He'd show those blasted knots!

Suddenly, the cloud cover tore open and silver moonlight spread like a carpet over the ocean—the island and finally the coast. After the all-pervading darkness, it was suddenly ghostly bright. The trees, the bushes and the rocks were peeling out of the shadowy landscape. The coastline stood out in deep black from the puffy, silver-edged cloud sky.

And on the glistening water, a slim white sail emerged from the darkness. Majestically and silently, it glided towards the jetty. It was a fascinatingly beautiful sight. Despite the danger Jupiter and Bob were in, Pete could not avert his gaze for seconds.

"More visitors," he muttered. "Is there no end to it today?"

Jupiter's lungs hurt within a very short time. Like a chased rabbit fleeing from the wolf, he jumped from rock to rock, always hoping that Night Shadow would lose sight of him. But he did not. He came closer and closer. Jupe heard his heavy steps on the rocks.

The First Investigator noticed the slope only at the moment when his foot stepped into the void. What he thought was a shadow was actually a steep rock face. He stumbled into the depths with a suppressed scream.

He landed on soft grass. The slope hadn't been very high, just a metre and a half. But the shadow cast by the ledge offered sufficient protection. Jupiter recognized his chance, picked himself up and ran crouched along the rock face to the left and then around a corner. Here, he hid behind a rock and waited.

For a few seconds, Night Shadow must have lost sight of him. With a little luck, he would look for him in the wrong direction. With less luck, he would be in front of him in a few seconds. But Jupiter had to take the risk. He had no choice. His lungs burned, his legs trembled, and he could not have walked ten metres further.

The moonlight broke through the clouds as suddenly as if someone had switched on the light. The cover that Jupiter had sought was no longer there. He looked around in panic. The island, which had been full of hiding places just a minute ago, had suddenly turned into a light-flooded terrain. The numerous hiding places had shrunk. Moonlight glittered on the nearby water.

Then Night Shadow stood before him. "So here you are, you rascal... Get up!" The man raised his axe.

Jupiter rose trembling. Now he could look over the rock face to the jetty. A white sailboat was heading for it. It shone in the moonlight like an apparition of ghosts.

Night Shadow followed his gaze. "I can't let you..." The man lowered his axe, turned around and stared at the jetty.

On the deck of the sailboat stood a figure dressed in white. He threw a line on the jetty and jumped out nimbly. The figure moored the boat, ran up the jetty.

Night Shadow gave Jupiter a sinister look.

"You don't move from here!" he growled hoarsely. Then the man in black went away.

Bob woke up with a throbbing headache. Moaning, he opened his eyes. It was dark. Where was he? He tried to move, but something stopped him. He was crouched on the floor with his arms turned to his back and tied to something. The restraints cut his wrists.

Slowly his memory came back. Someone had knocked him down and then stunned him! And obviously that someone had tied him up and locked him up somewhere. Bob sniffed. There was a slight smell of oil and petrol. So he was in the generator building.

Bob checked how far he could move. He wasn't able to stand on his feet. His wrists had been tied to something with thick tape. His fingers couldn't get far, but far enough to reach the end of the small pocket knife he had taken from the salvage yard and put in his back pocket.

"All right," Bob mumbled grimly. "I'll just have to free myself then!"

The last knot wasn't a knot, it was just a loop. It loosened when Pete pulled the leash. At last!

The Second Investigator unfolded the paraglider. The chute was immediately inflated by the wind. Pete quickly grabbed the strap before it could be blown off the roof and put it on.

Trying not to give the glider a chance to fully unfold yet, Pete stepped to the edge of the roof and looked down.

He saw the white figure running up the jetty towards the gate. Where was Jupe? The Second Investigator scanned the surroundings, but despite the bright moonlight, he could not see the First Investigator anywhere. But wherever he was, Pete had to take care of Bob and rescue him from the small building! He ran to a spot on the roof where he could not be seen by Night Shadow and pulled the lines with a jerk. The paraglider behind his back reared up, caught the wind and floated up like a kite.

Pete took a deep breath and jumped.

8. The Trap is Sprung!

Pete had imagined gliding over the island in a gently curved arc and landing elegantly right in front of the small building. But it turned out differently. He took a nosedive. Then the wind reached into the paraglider like a divine hand and carried it upwards, higher and higher over the villa until he had a complete view of it. Slowly it drifted towards the edge of the island. Behind it lay the open, ice-cold, night-black ocean.

“No way,” Pete growled grimly, reached up and grabbed the bundles of lines that led to his body harness on the left and right. He pulled on them vigorously. The paraglider arched and the Second Investigator fell into the depths.

It had not been easy to pull the knife out of the pocket. But the task of unfolding it was even more difficult. With numb, trembling fingers, Bob clung to the knife. Carefully, he felt the notch where he could fold the blade out of the handle. Then he pulled.

The knife slipped out of his hand. At the last moment, Bob caught it between his ring and middle finger. He breathed again, took the knife firmly in his hand and tried it a second time.

The third attempt was successful. The knife snapped open. Bob turned it and started sawing through the tape. Little by little, the pressure of the restraints loosened and the blood flowed back into his fingers. Then he finally had his hands free! He put the knife back in his trousers pocket, took his aching arms forward and massaged his wrists. He picked himself up, groaning and groping around.

His adversary had tied him directly to the generator. Bob stumbled blindly across the room until he found the door. He tried to push the handle down, but it didn't move at all. It was the second time that night he had been locked in. Bob kicked the door in frustration. Then he went off to look for his backpack. He didn't have much hope that it was still here, but with any luck...

His foot struck something soft. Bob bent down and felt smooth nylon fabric. “Here we go.” Within seconds, he had his flashlight in his hand, turned it on and looked around.

Soon his eyes fell on the small white canister containing petrol.

The fall into the depths frightened Pete so much that he immediately released the lines of the paraglider. Immediately the glider caught the wind again. It had lost a few metres in height—just what he had wanted.

After his heartbeat had calmed down, Pete pulled the lines again, this time much more carefully and only on the left side. His flight direction changed. He made a left turn. Pete pulled harder, and the arc he flew became tighter. A smile crept up on the face of the Second Investigator. He aimed at the small building and steered the glider in the right direction. Gently and elegantly like a seagull he glided towards his target.

He had covered half the distance when he suddenly saw Jupiter storming towards the villa as if he was on the run. The First Investigator didn't see him. Pete was still thinking about how he could silently attract attention, but by then Jupiter had already disappeared into the interior of Knox Villa.

When Night Shadow left, Jupiter immediately took a look at the jetty and saw the figure in a white suit entering the gate. There was no doubt who he was—Victor Hugenay! Jupiter had to act while there was still time.

Jupiter jumped up and ran to the house. He ran up the three wooden steps and entered through the front door. He had memorized the floor plan of the individual floors on the building blueprints so well that he knew the way. And the moonlight falling through the windows provided enough light for him.

Jupiter ran down a corridor to a narrow staircase and from there to the first floor. The corridor in which he now found himself resembled a battlefield. Night Shadow had smashed several doors with his axe. They were hanging from the hinges as if they had been blown apart by a bomb. The ground was covered with wood splinters. A fresh wind blew through a broken window. Jupiter remembered the glass smashing that he had heard earlier. It had to be this broken window. He tore himself away from the sight of destruction and rushed up the next staircase to the uppermost floor. Night Shadow had not yet come this far.

This floor was built differently. A passageway ran once along the outer wall. Silver moonlight painted distorted rectangles through the windows on the floor and walls. Four doors led into the interior of the house.

But Jupiter's gaze was directed towards the ceiling. Soon, he found the skylight. Nearby stood a small stepladder. Jupiter unfolded it, climbed up, pushed the latch aside and opened the hatch. Above him was the night sky. Jupiter stuck his head through the opening. The roof top was deserted. Pete was no longer here.

Suddenly Jupiter heard rumbling footsteps coming from the ground floor. Someone had entered the villa! Hugenay or Night Shadow—Jupiter didn't know. But whoever it was, he was in a great hurry and came up the stairs in big steps.

Pete started to land. During the last few metres, he was still scared, but now there was no turning back. The ground rushed towards him, his feet touching the wet grass and he started to run. He skilfully absorbed the force of the impact and continued running until the paraglider collapsed behind him.

Quickly he loosened his harness and threw his glider and himself carelessly behind a rock. He had not hit the small building as accurately as he had planned. In fact, he was nearer to the villa entrance. He wanted to go back to the small building—but he stopped abruptly.

The man in the white suit had appeared behind a nearby hill and ran towards the villa. It was Hugenay! Pete ducked, so as not to be seen.

Hugenay jumped up the wooden stairs and disappeared into the villa. Pete was torn. Jupiter was in there! Was he in danger? Should he follow him? But what about Bob?

Pete had not yet decided what to do when suddenly another figure appeared. With his black coat blowing, Night Shadow stormed into Knox Villa.

"Damn," Pete hissed and made a decision. He stood up and ran towards the house as well. Bob had to wait.

Jupiter hastily climbed down the ladder and looked around for a hiding place. There was none. So he ran around the next corner and pressed himself against the wall.

The steps reached the top floor and came closer. A door was opened.

The First Investigator crept towards the open door and took a look through it. Victor Hugenay stood with his back to him and looked at a series of paintings hanging on the wood-panelled wall. But he soon lost interest and turned to a door that led further inside the house. He opened it and took a step in. It was another room and he shone his flashlight at a single painting in a heavy golden frame that was hanging on the wall.

Suddenly someone trampled up the stairs from the ground floor. Jupiter flinched. And Hugenay turned around.

The master thief was surprised for a second at most. Then he smiled softly. "Jupiter! I would be surprised not to see you again tonight!"

Jupiter relaxed a little, but stood just outside the door of the first room instead of entering it. The rumbling steps had reached the first floor by now.

"You have a visitor, Mr Hugenay," the First Investigator said.

Hugenay nodded. "I know. So please forgive my rudeness, but I must hurry a little. We will talk later, I promise!"

Bob shook the last drop of petrol from the canister into the tank of the generator. It had not been much, but it had to be enough. He carefully closed the tank, then turned to the generator switches. He hesitated.

He could now switch on the generator. It would start up and produce electricity. And for a few minutes, the island would be powered.

But Bob had no idea what was going on out there. Was Pete still on the roof? Had Jupiter found the stranger? Where was Brittany? Bob didn't know. All he could do was make assumptions. Turning on the generator could be exactly the right decision—or exactly the wrong one.

On the other hand... doing nothing got Bob nowhere. He sighed. His fingers reached across the main switch, gliding over the indicators and wandering back again.

"Come on, Bob!" he admonished himself. Then he turned on the generator.

Pete didn't know which way to turn. He was on the ground floor. To the left? To the right? Above him, he heard footsteps. Upstairs! He only had to find the stairs. Pete turned left. Suddenly, he heard a noise from one of the rooms here on the ground floor. The Second Investigator crept up to it and took a look inside.

It was a large, elegantly furnished salon. The moonlight fell through a window. Heavy leather armchairs stood in the corners. On the walls were high bookshelves. And in the middle of the room stood Brittany.

"Oh, there you are," Pete cried in relief.

Brittany spun around, dropped a small bottle she had been holding in her hand in shock, and stared at him in horror.

But before Pete could say anything, a blue glow suddenly flared up outside. It shone through the windows and bathed the salon in a spooky light.

"What..." Pete started and stepped towards the window.

With a loud rumbling and rattling sound, grilles fell down in front of the windows and doors of the room. They crashed to the ground like hatchets and blocked every escape route. Something clicked into place. Pete spun around. Even in front of the door he had just stepped through, a grille had appeared. They were trapped!

When the bright light fell through the windows, Jupiter froze like a rabbit caught in headlights. Suddenly there was a crash and rumble all over the villa. It sounded as if the building was about to collapse. The noise lasted for three seconds, then echoed for a moment and finally faded away. The angry roar of Night Shadow reached them.

The First Investigator understood immediately what had happened. The mouse trap! Bob had activated it! He looked up at the door of the first room in front of which he was standing. There were metal rails here too, and also over the door of the second room that Mr Hugenay was in. But the grilles remained in place. He looked up to the ceiling and discovered a small box. The sensor would trigger the trap if it sensed any movement in the room.

But Jupiter was frozen... and so had Hugenay. Both knew that if they moved, the grilles would come down. They looked at each other. Jupiter saw the horror in Hugenay's eyes. It almost relieved him. Whatever Hugenay's plan had been, he had not foreseen this development.

"Well, Mr Hugenay," Jupiter said softly. "You probably know what just happened. As soon as one of us moves, the grilles will come down and you will be locked in a cage. You wanted to talk to me? I think you'll have ample opportunity now."

9. Standstill

“What have you done?” Hugenay asked hoarsely. It was the first time that Jupiter saw him unsettled.

“The backup generator just switched on,” Jupiter coolly replied. “Actually, I think it was Bob. If you move, then—”

“I understand, Jupiter,” Hugenay interrupted him abruptly. Then his voice became softer. “And you too, it seems. With a single movement, you could lock me in this room. But then the grilles would also close in front of the windows and you would lock yourself in as well—both forward and backward. You are in a quandary. It must be very frustrating.”

Jupiter smiled. “You are within reach of the goal of your dreams. The painting is hanging on the wall behind you, but you can’t reach it without moving. It’s over. Yes, it is frustrating, Mr Hugenay.”

Hugenay flashed at him. “And now I suppose you’re going to tell me that our esteemed Inspector Cotta is on his way to arrest me again.”

“Exactly. But until then, we have some time we could use for a conversation. I’d like to ask you a few questions.”

At first, Hugenay did not answer. He seemed to consider whether he really wanted to get involved in this conversation. But then he relaxed a little and a mild smile flitted across his face.

“Well, you’re probably right. It’s amazing anyway that we didn’t have the opportunity to talk in peace much earlier—without being overheard. We could have crossed paths long ago, after living a short distance from you for a long time.”

“For a long time?” Jupiter asked irritated. “But I thought you were in France.”

Hugenay’s smile widened. “Everyone believed that, yes. But in fact, I lived in the beach house for many months. It turned out to be very convenient that the French police were looking for me on the other side of the world after the three of you uncovered my faked death. No one even thought I was in California. I was near you all the time, Jupiter. I’ve been watching you—following your success as detectives in the press, and wondered if you thought of me sometimes.”

“Not half as often as you would like,” Jupiter lied and quickly changed the subject. “What were your plans for *Fire Moon*? Were you going to sell it? Was there a collector who offered you enough money? It’s not worth as much without the globe of the World Watcher—which I know is not in your possession.”

“Once again you are surprisingly well-informed, Jupiter—and yet still a long way off from the truth. You haven’t solved the mystery of *Fire Moon* yet, otherwise you wouldn’t be asking me these questions.”

“I have a strong hunch. Unfortunately, I can’t see the painting in the room behind you well enough to test my theory. But I’ll make it up to you.”

“When Inspector Cotta arrives?”

“Quite so.”

Before Mr Hugenay could respond, he was interrupted by a loud noise. A smashing and crashing sound that Jupiter thought was all too familiar.

“Señor Juárez doesn’t seem pleased,” Hugenay said.

“Juárez? Is that the name of Night Shadow?”

“Yes,” Hugenay replied. “He can get very irascible, as you have no doubt noticed, Jupiter.”

“He’s trapped, just like us,” Jupiter said confidently. “And I don’t care about his temper.”

“Really? Well, he’s trapped, you’re right. Trapped between the grilles on the doors and windows. But as I noticed earlier, he has an axe with him. The grilles are modern steel, but the walls are merely made of centuries-old wood. How long do you think it will take him to find his way to us with an axe, Jupiter? Will Inspector Cotta arrive in time to save us?”

Jupiter swallowed.

“One minute we’re enemies, the next minute we’re allies,” Hugenay said coolly. “How quickly the tide can turn, dear Jupiter!”

Bob grew anxious by the minute. The generator rattled behind him and made it impossible for him to listen to what was happening outside. But even if he couldn’t hear or see what was going on on the island, everyone else must have heard the generator! Then why did no one come to get him out of here? Where were Jupiter and Pete?

Something had gone wrong—possibly by his turning on the generator, or possibly because of something else entirely. Either way, his friends could be in trouble. Bob had to find a way to free himself and go to their aid.

He looked around the generator building for the hundredth time. There wasn’t much there, just some garden tools. And even in his backpack, he hadn’t found anything that could have helped him. What could he do? There was a spade stuck under the door handle from outside. How could he do anything about it from here? The door reached down to the floor. There wasn’t the slightest gap through which he could have tried to push the spade away.

Could he do something about the door handle? He could try to pull it out. Bob paused in his search and turned towards the lock. He smiled. Getting rid of the door handle might not have been the worst idea!

“What is this? What’s happening? How do you get these things to open again?” Brittany ran from one grille to the next in panic, jiggling it as Pete picked up the little bottle she had dropped earlier.

“Calm down, for goodness’ sake!” Pete said and stepped up to her. “I don’t know exactly what happened but the spotlights out there are working again. My guess is that the power is back on. And these grilles are probably part of the security system. My guess is that they can’t be opened at all. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be very secure, would they?”

“But...” Brittany broke off and looked outside the window in consternation. “You can see the mainland from here. “Everything is dark there. So the power hasn’t come back on yet. Only the island is supplied with electricity. So Bob was successful! But where on earth is he? And Jupiter? And Hugenay? And Night Shadow? We must get out of here somehow!”

“Brittany!” Pete interrupted her. “Stay calm! And tell me what happened first. What did Bob succeed at?”

Brittany took a few deep breaths and finally reported Jupiter’s plan to turn the generator back on.

“But on the way back, I suddenly heard a noise. There was someone on the island! Jupiter went to look but he didn’t come back! I was standing outside the entrance to the

generator building as a lookout while Bob was inside, when suddenly someone crept up from behind and knocked me down! Didn't you see that from the roof?"

"No! I can't see the entrance from the roof! Who knocked you down, Brittany?"

"I don't know. I blacked out for a few seconds. When I woke up, I ran away from the generator building and hid."

"What about Bob?" Pete asked. "Why haven't you checked on him?"

"I was afraid that the attacker was around! I just wanted to get away, you know?"

Pete sighed. He did not understand. He would never have abandoned his friend. But maybe he expected too much from Brittany. After all, they weren't really friends. They were allies at best. "Then why did you come in here?" he probed. "And what is this thing, anyway?" He held the bottle out to her.

"I just found this. It was right here on the piano. Smell it."

Pete unscrewed the cap. A pungent smell of solvent went up his nose. "Chloroform," he muttered. "Or something similar. You can stun someone with this. And you found this here?"

Brittany nodded. "What does that mean?"

Pete didn't get a chance to answer. A terrible noise distracted them. It was the smashing and crashing of wood.

"Night Shadow," Pete said worriedly. "He must be trapped as we are... except that he has an axe."

The screwdriver on Bob's pocket knife fit perfectly. He removed screw by screw from the cover of the door lock until it could easily be turned to the side.

He immediately discovered the pin that held the door handle in place. Bob pressed the end of the screwdriver against it and pushed the pin out. The door handle could be pulled off without any problems. The outside door handle was still there, but that was a small thing. Bob pushed a piece of wood he had found in a dusty corner into the hole and pushed the outside door handle out the other side. With that, the spade fell to the side.

"Yes!" Bob triumphed, pushed the door handle back in and pressed it down. The door swung open and Bob stepped into a strange world of coloured light.

The spotlights threw red, blue and yellow light fields onto the villa, the ground and into the sky. It was like an abandoned, spooky fairground. Only the humming of the high-powered spotlights could be heard, otherwise there was silence.

Suddenly it stuttered and rumbled behind him. Bob turned around and looked through the door to the generator. The red warning light on the fuel gauge came on! That meant that the petrol was running low. And now the spotlights began to flicker. The electrical buzzing got louder.

For the second time that night, the show was over.

When the light that fell through the windows began to flicker, Jupiter knew he had no choice. The power was about to fail again. A few more seconds and the mouse trap would not work. Jupiter had to do something—now! A look at Hugenay's face told him that even the master thief had realized what was going to happen.

Suddenly everything happened very fast. Jupiter jumped into the first room to trigger the motion detector. At the same moment, Victor Hugenay slipped further into the second room, away from the door. The motion detector emitted a beep and not half a second later, the grilles rattled, crashed to the floor and locked in place.

A heartbeat later, the lights outside went out and Knox Island sank back into darkness.

10. Jaccard's Secret

Jupiter rummaged for his flashlight, finally found it and switched it on. He shone through the grille into the room behind—the room where Hugenay was trapped in, and where a single painting adorned the wall.

“A pretty stalemate you got us into,” Hugenay said as he turned to Jupiter.

“Excuse me, but where, pray tell, is the stalemate, Mr Hugenay? It looks to me like you’ve lost. You are where you wanted to be, yes, but you can’t get out.”

Jupiter directed the light onto the painting in front of which Hugenay stood. It was large and the golden frame shimmered in the light of the flashlight.

The painting showed a wealth of colourful forms, spots and lines that had been thrown together seemingly arbitrarily. The First Investigator couldn’t see anything specific in it—especially not something that looked like a painting that was named *Fire Moon*.

One thing Jupiter saw at first glance was that the painting was no Jaccard. The First Investigator had studied the painter’s work sufficiently in the last few weeks to be able to say this without a doubt. All the typical Jaccard elements, the line management, the handling of forms and colours were missing. Someone else must have painted it.

“Now I would be interested to listen to your comments about this painting,” said Hugenay. “What do you see?”

“This painting does not exhibit the elements of a typical Jaccard painting.”

“Very good. You’ve done your homework. What else do you see?”

“If this painting is really *Fire Moon*, then *Fire Moon* is an anamorphosis. The elongated shapes and stripes strongly suggest it. So you need a specially-shaped mirror to make the actual image appear. And this mirror is the globe of the World Watcher.

“On Raúl Hernández’s tomb it says: ‘If you have seen the world, you have already seen a lot, but you only know half the truth,’” Jupiter continued. “The ‘world’ refers to the globe of the World Watcher. And on Jean-Marie Jaccard’s tomb it says: ‘If you have seen the last work, you have already seen a lot, but you only know half the truth.’ The ‘last work’ refers to Jaccard’s last painting.”

Victor Hugenay smiled appreciatively. “Well, yes... and no.”

Another crash made Jupiter flinch. Then he clearly heard footsteps rushing up a staircase.

“Señor Juárez seems to have cleared a hurdle,” Hugenay said. “He’s coming closer, Jupiter. You better hurry if you want to solve this mystery. But I confess... you are in a disadvantaged position, standing so far from the painting. Look closely, Jupiter—at the bottom right-hand corner!”

The First Investigator was furious that Hugenay was dictating the rules to him again, that he was telling him once again what to do. Nevertheless, Jupiter came as close as possible, shone his flashlight on the painting and squinted his eyes. At the lower right edge of the painting, there was a signature—the signature of the painter. Jupiter recognized it immediately. After all, he had seen it more than once in the last few weeks.

“Well?”

“This painting is by Hernández!” cried Jupiter in surprise. “That means that the legendary Jaccard painting is hidden in this Hernández anamorphosis!”

The First Investigator pinched his lower lip and thought hard. “There are only two possible explanations. One—Jaccard and Hernández did the painting together... But I can rule that out, because the letters show that during that time of the painting was done, the two were apart in different continents. Therefore, I am actually only considering possibility number two—even if it’s a crazy theory, it’s still the only logical one.”

“I am curious!” Hugenay said.

Jupiter turned his eyes away from the painting and looked at Hugenay. Then he said: “The paintings of Raúl Hernández and Jean-Marie Jaccard were done by the same person!”

When a face appeared at the window, Pete collapsed in horror. But a second later, he realized who it was.

“Bob!” he shouted and jumped to the window. His friend was standing outside trying to talk to him. “Wait!” Pete shoved his hands through the bars. He managed to push the window up. Cool air blew into the room. “Bob, thank goodness!”

“Pete! What happened? I was knocked down, but I don’t know by whom! Is Jupe with you?”

“No, but Brittany is here.”

“What’s going on, anyway?” Bob questioned.

“A lot,” Pete replied. “But it can wait. Bob, I’m stuck here. But I have an idea. I need tools. A crowbar or something.”

“A crowbar?”

“Yes. Is there such a thing out there?”

Bob wondered. “All I could offer you would be a... a spade.”

“Also good. Bring it to me! Hurry! Oh, and the roll of tape from your backpack! But be careful! There might be someone else out there.”

“Who?”

“I wish I knew.”

Bob nodded, disappeared and returned a minute later with the tape and spade. Luckily the spade fit through the window and the grille.

“Thank you, Bob!”

“Now what?”

“Now wish me luck!”

“Can I help in any way?” Bob asked.

“I don’t see how.”

“I could try turning the power back on. Do you think that’d do any harm? I could use the spotlights to send an SOS signal to the mainland.”

“SOS sounds good,” Pete thought. “Yes! SOS is just what we need! Go ahead!”

While Bob disappeared into the darkness again, Pete set to work. He went to the door leading out into the hall and rammed the spade into a gap between two floorboards at the door below the grille.

“What are you going to do?” asked Brittany, who had pressed herself anxiously into a corner and watched.

“I’ll dig our way out,” grunted Pete as he tried to pry the floorboard out of its anchorage with the spade. The first nails were already coming out of the wood.

“And then? What are you going to do, fight Night Shadow?”

“Yes.”

“But this is madness! He has a weapon!”

Pete turned and grinned. "So do I."

"Congratulations, Jupiter. I knew I wasn't wrong about you. You have great potential."

"Then it's really true? Hernández... never existed? But we stood at his tomb."

"Oh, he very well existed... But he was not a painter. He never did a single painting."

"Not one? You mean... all the Hernández paintings were really done by Jaccard?"

"That's right."

Jupiter was confused. "Sure... at least that explains why shortly after Jaccard's death, Hernández himself stopped painting and he feigned that 'the sense of art left him'. But I don't understand the reason for this double game. Why didn't Jaccard present the paintings under his own name? Why did he pretend that they were done by someone else?"

"Because Jean-Marie Jaccard wanted to try things other than what had made him famous—other styles, gimmicks, reflections, anamorphoses, sculpture... But he knew his audience didn't want that. Lovers of his paintings expected Jaccards to look like Jaccards. They expected art, not gimmicks."

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully and repeated what Bob had said on their first visit to Hernández House: "Versatility is a quality that is, surprisingly, not appreciated in the art world."

"That's right. Jaccard's paintings were unique. But all the gimmicks he wanted to try weren't. The art world would have been disappointed, maybe even horrified, at how a painter as great as Jaccard could suddenly put himself up for it."

"So Jaccard simply put another name for his experimental paintings," Jupiter concluded. "His friend Hernández's... and Hernández played the game. He pretended to be a painter and sculptor, although he had never did a single painting or sculpture. So that was the secret the letters were talking about!"

"As Jaccard lay dying, he wondered whether he should tell the world the truth. But he decided not to do so and instead painted *Fire Moon*—a painting to show that the Hernández paintings were really his. Because if you straighten out that Hernández anamorphosis behind you with the help of the globe, you'll see a real Jaccard! But Jaccard left it to chance whether this secret would ever be revealed."

"Right. And at this point in time, only two people know this—you and me. Not even Julie knows, although she's suspected it for years, but she's never been able to prove it. And Charles Knox has no idea what he bought at an auction a few years ago. To him, it was just an untitled Hernández painting—valuable, but not nearly as valuable as a real Jaccard. It's interesting that two people who don't really care about art should know the secret, don't you think?"

Jupiter frowned. "Don't really care about art? You really mean that, don't you? You don't really care about art? How does a man like you become an art thief?"

"That's what I tried to explain to you last time, Jupiter. It's a game. A lot of people in this world believe that these paintings are worth a lot of money. Well, I'm happy to play the game as long as they pay me that money."

"But that's all over now... or how do you intend to get *Fire Moon* out of this room? You're trapped, Mr Hugenay."

Again the master thief smiled. "You're making a little mistake, Jupiter. Who says I wanted to steal *Fire Moon*?"

The First Investigator looked Hugenay in the face and saw a frightening calm in it. "What are you up to?"

Instead of answering, Hugenay reached into his jacket and pulled out a small device. Jupiter pointed his flashlight at it. It was a metal rod. Hugenay pressed a button and a small, light blue flame, like a Bunsen burner, hissed out of the tip.

“What are you doing?”

“I will make sure that no one else ever gets to see *Fire Moon* again—not you or me or Julie or anyone else. The legend of *Fire Moon* ends here right now.”

He approached the painting and held up the hissing flame.

11. The Final Game

“Stop!” Jupiter jumped forward and reached through the bars of the grille. But Hugenay was too far away for him. “What are you doing? You want to destroy the painting?”

Hugenay turned to him. His smile was gone. He said nothing. But that was enough for an answer.

“Why?” Jupiter yelled.

Again it looked as if Hugenay didn’t want to answer, but finally he said: “It’s worthless.”

“Worthless? It’s a Jaccard! A Jaccard that no one has ever seen before and that is considered a legend! And it’s proof that all Hernández paintings are really Jaccards! All of which makes this painting probably the most spectacular and most valuable painting in the world!”

“That may be so... but yet it’s nothing more than—”

“—A bit of oil paint on a piece of canvas. Yes, I know that,” Jupiter interrupted him. “But you cannot possibly be serious!”

“I fear that I have seldom been more serious.” Again, Hugenay turned to the painting with the blue flame.

“Stop!” said Jupiter. “I don’t buy your story. You want to burn the painting because it’s worthless? Nonsense! I don’t believe a word you’re saying!”

“What you believe, Jupiter, is completely irrelevant in this case,” Hugenay said. “I came here to destroy *Fire Moon*... and you can’t stop me. This is not a game.”

“Oh, no? Suddenly it’s not a game anymore? It’s all just a game to you, Mr Hugenay! And you know what?” Jupiter was desperately thinking very hard. “This time, I’ll play the game... I’ll make you a deal. We play for the painting. I’m gonna ask you 10 questions. If I find out what you’re really up to, then you won’t destroy the painting. Agreed?”

“No. Because as I said before, this is not a game. I don’t see any reason why I should go into it. What’s in it for me if you can’t guess?”

“You win,” replied Jupiter.

“I already have,” Hugenay smirked.

“Wrong. You faked your victory. You didn’t play fair. In fact, you never did. But you’ll never get what you wanted from me all along.”

“This is where it gets interesting,” Hugenay pondered. “What do I want from you, Jupiter?”

“That I acknowledge you as the winner... as superior... as a teacher,” Jupiter said. “Every time we met, you talked about how I had great potential... that I could go far... that one day, we could work together. But each time, I refused that offer. And you know what I think, Mr Hugenay? I think you were angry at my resistance—terribly annoyed. And not because I refused to pursue a criminal career. You probably never seriously expected me to do so anyway... No, it annoyed you because I refused to accept you as the superior man. I denied you recognition. That annoyed you. You’re addicted to that recognition. What else makes a man want to be a glittering, sophisticated, and cunning master thief?”

Victor Hugenay shook his head grimly. “That must have been a really interesting psychology course you took in school, Jupiter Jones. But you make the same mistake as

many amateur psychologists... You infer from yourself to others. Could it be that you are talking about yourself rather than me? ... That you need this recognition? ... That you keep putting yourself in great danger because of it? What other than the desire for recognition drives a boy to slip into the role of the dazzling, eloquent and highly intelligent master detective?"

Jupiter thought of what Bob had accused him of when they were trapped in the generator building. Bob had said very similar things. "Well, it seems we have more in common than I'd like to admit, Mr Hugenay." He smiled. "That's why this game is so important... so that there is a winner at last."

Jupiter took a deep breath. Suddenly he was very calm inside. He had reached the master thief with his words. He could see that in his face.

"You know what, Jupiter? You never cease to amaze me."

"Does that mean you'll play?" Jupiter asked.

"Five... Five questions," Hugenay said. "And I'll only answer 'true' or 'false'."

"Okay," Jupiter agreed.

Hugenay lowered his fire stick. With the extinguishing of the hissing flame, it became alarmingly quiet. Even the smashing and crashing noises had stopped. The moon hid again half behind the clouds and sent only a faint glimmer through the windows.

Jupiter asked his first question into the darkness: "Do you want to destroy *Fire Moon* so that no one but you can get your hands on it, or is it a specific person that you want to prevent, like Julianne Wallace?"

"How shall I answer this with 'true' or 'false', Jupiter?"

"All right," Jupiter said quickly and tried again: "The main reason for your plan is that Julianne Wallace or someone else is not getting the painting. You suspect that you will no longer leave Knox Villa a free man. And you want to prevent anyone else from taking credit for the discovery of *Fire Moon*. In other words, if neither we nor Night Shadow had shown up on Knox Island tonight, you wouldn't destroy the painting. True or false?"

"False."

The First Investigator swallowed. He guessed he had to say goodbye to that lead. He'd been so sure of himself. Still, he had the feeling that he wasn't one hundred percent wrong.

"So you really wanted to destroy it from the beginning?" Jupiter asked.

"Is that really your second question, Jupiter?"

"No," said the First Investigator quickly. "No. Give me a moment!"

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. Then he said: "You want to destroy the painting to prevent the whole world from knowing the truth about Jaccard and Hernández. The fact that Hernández never actually painted a painting will turn the art world upside down. A lot of people are gonna suddenly become very rich, as all Hernández paintings are actually Jaccards. You want to avoid that at all costs. True or false?"

"False," answered Mr Hugenay with a smile.

Jupiter was brooding. He was on the wrong track. He was definitely on the wrong track. And he only had three questions left. What were the options?

"Then you're concerned with the legend itself. It is not the truth that shall be withheld, but the legend of *Fire Moon* shall live on. For some reason, you want people to continue to believe or not believe in the existence of the painting, but there should be no proof. That gives you some sort of advantage."

Hugenay shook his head regretfully. "False again. And that was the third 'false' in a row. You disappoint me a little, Jupiter."

Jupiter lowered his eyes. He had not the slightest idea in which direction he should ask further. He had to gain time somehow! Time to think! But Hugenay left him none.

"Come on, Jupiter, the clock is ticking!"

"All right." Jupiter cleared his throat. "Perhaps the fire is not for destroying the painting at all... But it will bring out something underneath it or hidden in it?"

"False. The fire should and will destroy the painting," Hugenay said. "Your last question, Jupiter! I am curious!"

Jupiter's mind was working at full blast. In fast-forward, he rewound all the facts he had collected during the course of the case once more before his inner eye—the story of Jaccard... the story of Hernández... the story of Hugenay... and finally, he had an idea. His theory was insane—but that didn't mean it couldn't be true.

"If all my suspicions were wrong so far, then there is only one logical explanation left," he finally said slowly and thoughtfully.

"Which is?"

"The painting contains information that no one should know—one that goes beyond just revealing the arrangements between Jaccard and Hernández. Once you decode the anamorphosis using the globe, you'll see something you'd rather keep secret. The mystery of *Fire Moon* goes deeper than I ever imagined. It's not just because all the Hernández paintings are actually by Jaccard, but there's something else behind it... something that only you know about—and you want it to stay that way."

The moonlight broke through the clouds and Jupiter could see Hugenay's face when he said: "True." He wasn't smiling.

Suddenly, Jupiter was very excited. Because all of a sudden a lot of puzzle pieces slid into place and he had the feeling that he was very, very close to the solution. "It's about something personal," he continued. "Something very private."

"I fear the game is over, Jupiter. You've had your five questions. You didn't have the right answer. I'm truly sorry for you." Victor Hugenay lit the little blue flame a second time. It bathed his face in a cold light.

"No!" cried Jupiter. "I've had my five questions, but I have not yet presented you with the solution! The rules of the game stipulate that I would know the truth after the five questions. So let me present my theory to you! Because I think I actually know why you want to destroy *Fire Moon*."

Hugenay was still not smiling. He looked at him grimly. Then his gaze suddenly wandered over Jupiter's shoulder and he was startled.

Alarmed, Jupiter turned around. On the other side of the grille in the passageway stood Night Shadow. He pointed his gun at Jupiter. "You again!" he growled.

"Señor Juárez," Mr Hugenay said calmly, and came closer. "Don't do anything stupid! Put your gun down."

"Shut up, Hugenay! Why should I listen to you? You're behind bars. Not me... Too bad!"

"What do you want?" Hugenay asked sharply.

"What do you think, Hugenay? The painting, of course! I suggest you take it off the wall now, hand it to the boy through the grille and he will give it to me. Otherwise, I will shoot the boy."

12. *Adios Amigo!*

“Señor Juárez,” Hugenay began calmly, but Night Shadow interrupted him abruptly.

“Weren’t you listening to me, Hugenay? The painting! Now!”

Jupiter looked anxiously from one to the other. He knew by now how ruthless Night Shadow could be. He had no doubt Juárez would make good on his threat.

Hugenay seemed to see it differently: “You don’t harm the boy.”

“Stop talking nonsense and give me the painting! Now!” With one click, he released the safety catch of the gun.

Hugenay looked at Jupiter. The First Investigator didn’t know what to say. “Mr Hugenay, I...”

“Never mind, Jupiter. We’ll postpone our game until another time. At the moment, it seems that we have both lost this round... or do you really think I would risk your life?”

Without another word, he took the painting from the wall, stepped up to the grille with it and handed it to the First Investigator.

For a moment, Jupiter held the most valuable painting in the world in his hands. With it he turned to Night Shadow, who still had his gun pointed at him, and suddenly wondered why he should give him the painting.

“Quick, boy!” Night Shadow demanded.

Jupiter firmly said: “No,” and he carefully leaned the painting against the wall.

“You give me the painting right now or—”

“—Or you’ll shoot me? Go ahead, Mr Juárez. I’m afraid you won’t be able to get to the painting, though, because there’s still these pretty bars in front of you. May I further point out that the painting alone is of no use to you whatsoever. The painting is an anamorphosis, if you know what that is. You need the key to make the actual painting visible. Without the key, it is worthless. And you have no idea where that key is.”

Night Shadow took a threatening step forward and stuck his arm through the grille up to his elbow, pointing his gun at Jupiter.

“Don’t fool around, Jupiter,” Hugenay warned. “This painting is not worth it.”

Jupiter knew that Hugenay was right. Of course the painting wasn’t worth it. He hadn’t intended to keep this bluff up for long. All he wanted was to buy time—hoping that Cotta would show up in time... or some miracle would happen.

The petrol sloshed back and forth in the canister as Bob dragged it from the motorboat back to the generator. His hands burned like fire, but he hardly noticed.

When he reached the generator building, he ripped open the door, turned on the flashlight and immediately set about filling the generator tank a second time. This time the canister was half full. Bob shook it until the last drop had gone into the tank. Then he closed the lid and turned on the generator. Spitting and rattling, the generator went to work again. And from one second to the next, the island was lit up again as bright as day. Bob rushed outside. A dozen spotlights shone down on Knox Island.

The blue, red and yellow lights flashed up outside and shone through the windows right up to the passageway.

Juárez was distracted for a second. Jupiter, who realized what had just happened, rushed forward, and with both hands, slammed the man's forearm against the grille, and gripped it firmly against a bar. Juárez cried out in pain. A shot went off into the wall and then he dropped the gun. Jupiter fished for it with his foot and kicked it out of range. Then he pulled as hard as he could on the man's arm until Juárez was locked between two bars up to his shoulder. Jupe then bent back Juárez's forearm so that he could not pull his arm out.

Suddenly a figure rushed forward from the passageway. "That's it, Jupe, don't let go," Pete cried, throwing himself at Juárez.

Jupiter was so surprised that he almost let go of Juárez's arm. Then he figured that Pete had no chance. Juárez was almost a head taller than him and trained like an Olympic athlete. He'd beat the Second Investigator to a pulp. Night Shadow was already beginning to slip from Jupiter's grip.

But suddenly, Pete pulled a small white cloth out of his pocket and pressed it in front of Juárez's nose. Night Shadow roared with rage and struggled, but Pete didn't let go. Then the man's resistance suddenly weakened. The arm that Jupiter was clutching became limp, and Night Shadow collapsed like a balloon from which the air was released.

"Ha!" cried Pete triumphantly. "That's it, Señor Night Shadow! *Adios amigo!*"

"Pete! How did you...? What...?" Jupe stammered.

"Nice to see you speechless for once, Jupe, I'll mark it in my calendar as a historical date. But before I go into your stammering, I'm gonna take care of our *amigo* here, otherwise he might wake up before I can tie him up in a package!"

The Second Investigator pulled out a roll of tape, turned his arms behind the motionless man's back and began tying him up. Over and over again he wrapped the tape around his wrists.

"But where did you get the narcotics?" Jupe asked.

"From Brittany. She found it here in one of the rooms. Bob was sent to the land of dreams with it, but we don't know by whom yet. But he's awake now."

Jupiter burst out laughing with relief. "Pete, it is... great!"

"I know. Reckless, but great," Pete remarked. "And we all decided not to do anything reckless tonight, didn't we? Would you do me a favour, Jupe? How about next time we really stick to it?"

Jupiter smiled. "Agreed."

The colourful light behind the windows faded.

"What's wrong now?" Jupiter asked.

"Oh, that's probably Bob turning off some of those spotlights... so that his SOS signal can be seen better."

Jupiter smiled. "Sometimes I wonder why I'm actually the First Investigator when you guys do just fine without me."

"I wonder too, Jupe."

The spotlights out there on the island went out except for one. And this one started blinking.

Pete stepped to the window and looked out. "Bob is already at work. S-O-S." But suddenly Pete saw something else. A figure appeared. It ran in a wide arc around Bob, running towards the gate.

"Hello?" Pete wondered.

"What's wrong?"

“Brittany is loose. She was supposed to wait downstairs. But now she ran out.”

“How could she leave the villa?” Jupe said. “The exits are all blocked!”

“Mr Night Shadow here has already made an escape route through the wall to the outside,” Pete explained. “I saw the hole on the way up here.”

“What is she doing?”

“She has just run out the gate... Jupe, looks like she’s running to our boat! But how does she know where it’s hidden?”

“Because I told her,” Jupiter answered grimly. “Is she trying to run away?”

“Looks that way... To call the police?” Pete asked hopefully.

Jupiter shook his head. “No. Certainly not. Pete, do you really think she just found a bottle of chloroform in here somewhere?”

“Yes, because there’s someone else skulking around on this island. He must have left it here,” said Pete sheepishly, “At least that’s what she said...”

“Pete, there’s no one else here but us. Brittany fooled us. She claimed to see someone on the island when there were none. She brought the chloroform. She drugged Bob. She threw a rock to break a window to lure Night Shadow out... but her plan didn’t work. And now she’s escaping... with our boat.”

Pete stared stunned at the First Investigator. “She... she was lying to us the whole time, wasn’t she? And now she’s escaping in our boat? But... but...” Pete gasped for breath. “Your backpack is in the boat!”

Pete quickly bent down, pulled a key from Señor Juárez’s pocket, turned around and ran down the stairs.

“Pete!” cried Jupiter after him. “What are you doing?”

But the Second Investigator did not hear him at all.

Victor Hugenay, who had stayed in the background the whole time, burst out into resounding laughter.

Bob was still so busy using the spotlight to send a distress signal that the sound of the motorboat entered his consciousness far too late. He looked up in irritation. The boat was moving away from the island. It was their boat.

Bob let the spotlight be the searchlight, swung his backpack from his shoulder and rummaged through it for the binoculars. But when he finally held it up to his eyes, the boat had already disappeared into the darkness.

“Bob!” a voice shouted right into his ear. Bob dropped the binoculars in fright.

“Pete! Are you crazy to scare me like that! Are you all right? You won’t believe this, but our boat just took off!”

“I know!” Pete burst out. “And we have to follow it. Come on!”

Pete dragged Bob with him. On the way to the jetty he told him briefly what had happened.

“Brittany?” Bob repeated in disbelief.

“Yes. By the way, Jupiter’s lovely ex just hit you over the head, too.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“But you can,” Pete said. “And she was even prepared for everything... or how often do you carry a bottle of chloroform around with you? All she wanted to do was drug a bunch of people with her, uh, charm.”

“But what shall we do now?” Bob asked at a loss. “Without a boat?”

“Why, we have one after all!” Pete said and grinned at Night Shadow’s motorboat.

“Pete—”

“Don’t worry, Bob, boats are all the same, I can handle it!” The Second Investigator jumped on board.

“But Pete—”

“How to start the engine? What do you think I am, a beginner?” Pete triumphantly pulled out the key he had taken from Night Shadow. He put it in the ignition and started the engine.

“Come on, Bob, or we’ll lose her!”

“Pete!” Bob said sternly and climbed aboard. “We have a problem.”

“We won’t. This boat is much faster than ours! We’ll easily catch up with her!” Pete steered the boat away from the island and accelerated.

13. After Her!

For a long moment, it looked as if it was already too late. Brittany's boat had disappeared in the night. They could not hear it because their own engine was too loud. And there was nothing to see. But then Bob spotted the whitecaps dancing on the waves. And his eyes followed the trail. "There she is!"

Now Pete also discovered the small figure on the horizon. He steered the boat in the right direction and accelerated a little more.

They came closer. Now Brittany realized she was being followed. Her boat was speeding up. But she had no chance against the sleek vehicle of Night Shadow. Bob and Pete were gaining on her. Soon they were side by side.

"Stop, Brittany!" cried Bob.

Brittany sparkled at them angrily and yanked the wheel around. A wave of cold salt water sloshed against her bow and splashed Bob and Pete wet.

"Just you wait," Pete growled, turned the boat around and caught up again. This time he steered towards Brittany from the other side. She swerved again.

"Forget it, Brittany!" Bob cried. "You can't escape us with that thing!"

Pete made a third attempt. Now he steered past Brittany and cut her off. Brittany had to stop. "There you go! Have you finally learned your lesson!"

The two boats were now bobbing quietly on the water, Bob and Pete directly in front of Brittany's bow, so that they bumped slightly several times.

"Shut up, Pete!" hissed Brittany.

"I suggest we come aboard now," Bob said, and he was already fishing after the hook on Brittany's bow to pull the boat alongside.

"Hands off!" cried Brittany. "You think you've already won just because you've got the faster boat?"

"Because we have the faster boat, because there are two of us, and because we now know exactly that you are a traitor," Bob said. "Yes, I think we have actually won. What do you think, Pete?"

"We did, Bob."

"You two rookies shut up and listen to me!" Brittany lorded it over them. "You're not getting on board! Instead, you're going to jump into the water and swim fifty metres away. Leave the key in the ignition. I'm taking your boat. Then you can have yours back... Or swim ashore, whatever you want."

Bob and Pete burst out laughing. "Or else what?" Pete asked.

"Otherwise I'm going to throw this overboard," Brittany replied with a smile and held a large, spherically-filled backpack in the air. Demonstratively, she stretched out her arm and held the backpack just above the water. Bob and Pete's laughter stuck in their throats.

"Just take your time with the decision," said Brittany. "Just keep in mind, though, that my arm's getting pretty tired."

Bob cleared his throat. "One condition..."

"I don't think you're in a position to be making conditions!"

“We’re keeping the backpack,” Bob went on as if he hadn’t heard her. “You’ll get the faster boat and you can leave. But the backpack stays on board our boat.”

Brittany took a moment to think. “I’ll go with it.” She put the backpack back into the boat. “All right, everyone off to swim class!”

Bob and Pete took off their shoes, jeans and sweaters and threw them on board Brittany’s boat. Pete gave Brittany an angry look, then took a header into the icy water.

Bob followed the Second Investigator a little slower. The water was so cold that it took his breath away at first. He quickly began to swim.

“Keep going,” Brittany said as Pete and Bob moved away.

“That’s fifty metres!” Pete finally shouted. Then he whispered softly to Bob, “What are we doing here?”

“Just the thing,” Bob replied softly. “Trust me.”

“But she’ll get away!”

“We’ll see.”

Brittany climbed onto the bow of the boat and jumped over to Night Shadow’s boat—with the backpack.

“Hey!” yelled Pete. “Leave the backpack on our boat!”

But Brittany just laughed and started the engine. “So long, suckers!”

Roaring and foaming, the elegant motorboat of Night Shadow set sail and headed for the black silhouette of the coast.

“That bitch!” hissed Pete. He swam back to the boat as fast as he could and swung himself aboard. In a hurry, he put his clothes back on and turned to Bob who was still in the water. “Come on, Bob!”

A few seconds later, Bob had also reached the boat. Pete helped him on board.

“After her!” cried Bob, shivering in the icy air.

Pete sighed. “Forget it, Bob. We can’t catch up with her. You saw it, our boat is much too slow!”

Bob grinned. “Slow, yes, but we have an almost full tank... unlike hers.”

Pete frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I siphoned off Night Shadow’s petrol for the generator. By now, there should only be a few drops left. I’m surprised it got this far, anyway. That’s what I was trying to tell you earlier, but you didn’t let me finish.”

“You... you mean...”

“I mean, Brittany’s going to stop real soon—right in the middle of the ocean. So, Pete. Let’s get her!”

Night Shadow Señor Juárez was still fast asleep when Jupiter finished his story. He had quietly told Mr Hugenay his theory about the secret of *Fire Moon*. Victor Hugenay never interrupted him. Finally, the master thief nodded slowly. “You are right with every word.”

Suddenly Jupiter felt strangely depressed. He had won. He had found the painting and saved it. He had convicted Night Shadow and Victor Hugenay. And now he had unravelled the secret of *Fire Moon*. Why was he not triumphant?

Perhaps because he realized at that moment that this secret was a huge burden placed on him. He had to think very carefully how to deal with this knowledge.

Bob and Pete stayed on course even after they had long lost sight of Night Shadow’s boat. The closer they got to the coast, the more their hopes faded. Bob seemed to have been

mistaken. The fuel in the tank might have been enough to reach the mainland after all. If so, Brittany would be long gone by then.

But suddenly, it appeared before them. The proud, sleek boat of Night Shadow suddenly looked small and helpless. It was about 500 metres from shore. But that was far enough to prevent Brittany from swimming the last bit with a backpack in tow.

Pete steered the boat alongside and stopped.

“Well, Brittany?” he cried in a good mood. “Enjoying the view?”

“You rascals!” she hissed angrily. “You cheated me!”

“That’s about right,” Pete remarked.

“We only agreed to your demands,” Bob objected. “You wanted the boat and you got it.”

“And we wanted the backpack but didn’t get it!” Pete added.

“The game’s over for good, Brittany!” Bob said. “I’m coming over now.”

A wicked grin surrounded Brittany’s mouth. “Go ahead. Just let me make a little room first.” She picked up the backpack and took a swing.

“No!” Pete cried, took two steps and jumped.

The moment Pete landed safely on the other boat, Brittany hurled the backpack overboard. It flew through the night in a high arc, slammed into the water, floated for a few seconds and slowly sank into the dark waters. Bob and Pete gazed stunned at the surface of the water, where a few more air bubbles were rising before the last traces of the backpack disappeared.

Suddenly something flickered on the horizon. Santa Monica was the first city to emerge piece by piece from the darkness, bathing the coastline in warm, familiar light. The wave of light continued to the outskirts of Los Angeles. The reflection in the cloudy sky became brighter and brighter until it outshone the pale moonlight. The metropolis was there again, as if a magician had conjured it out of his hat.

Finally, it was Rocky Beach’s turn. The exactly two-hundred-year-old city responded with a silent but garishly colourful spectacle when all the installed spotlights flashed up in the same second. Magical light bathed the houses, the buildings, the streets and the sky in all the colours of the rainbow.

The night of shadows was over.

14. In the Depth

When Inspector Cotta and his men reached the island in half a dozen police boats, Pete and Bob were already waiting for him.

“Goodness, Bob! Pete! Don’t tell me you were responsible for that power outage! Where is Jupiter? And why is there a girl tied up there?”

“Good evening, Inspector Cotta,” Bob said, exhausted. “The tied up girl is an accomplice of Victor Hugenay... and a traitor. No, we are not responsible for the blackout. But the two people who are, are upstairs in Mr Knox’s villa, waiting to be arrested by you. One of them is Victor Hugenay, by the way. But I would prefer that Jupiter tell you the rest himself. He can do better than us. Besides, he would never forgive us if we stole his thunder and told you the whole story.”

Jupiter had heard the police boats a few minutes ago. He was still trapped between two barred doors, behind one was Victor Hugenay, and behind the other was the tied up Señor Juárez. He had woken up in the meantime and had made several unsuccessful attempts to free himself. By now, he was just sitting there, staring silently into space. Jupiter turned to Hugenay. “They’ll be here soon.”

“I know.”

“If there’s anything else you want to tell me...” Jupiter asked.

Victor Hugenay shook his head and then nodded in Juárez’s direction. “If we talk again, it will be in private. Until then, I can only ask you to keep this secret. Of course, you can do what you think is right, but please don’t make any rash decisions. There are some secrets that are better kept. Take some time to think about whether or not you want to reveal to the public. It would cause a very, very sensational reaction... and too much attention can sometimes be harmful. I recall an article in the newspaper by one Wilbur Graham...”

Jupiter waved him off. “There will be no more articles of this kind—neither about us nor about you... after all...” He looked down. “After all, you saved my life earlier. You could have kept the painting. Then Juárez would’ve shot me. But you proved that you’re not a hard-core criminal. You’re a gentleman thief.”

“Which means?”

“Which means that you will probably go to prison. But it also means that I can grant you your wish and keep the secret to myself.”

Hugenay nodded. “Thank you.”

Steps became loud. Several people had entered the house and were now working their way up to the second floor.

“Before we part ways, say ‘hi’ to Julie for me... and tell her I’m sorry. She is not my rival and never has been. She has acted with the best intentions all along. I only said the opposite to keep her on her toes and keep her from finding the painting. Her ambition is probably even greater than yours, Jupiter. I doubt that she could have made the promise you made to me.”

Then Inspector Cotta appeared in the passageway.

Jupiter turned to him and smiled in relief. “Good evening, Inspector Cotta. Nice of you to find your way here.”

“Move further to the right,” Bob demanded.

“Right!” said Jupiter scornfully. “We’re at sea here, Bob! There’s no right or left. Only port and starboard.”

Bob rolled his eyes. “My goodness, starboard then! ... Or port? What’s the difference, Jupe?”

“Starboard,” Jupiter said determinedly and turned to Pete. “Move a little more to the right, Pete!”

Pete laughed. Once again The Three Investigators had borrowed the boat from Jeffrey’s parents, but this time not without asking first.

Last night, the police had taken Juárez and Brittany away, while they were trying to contact Charles Knox in Rocky Beach. Finally, when Mr Knox returned to his villa, he released the grilles, and the police re-arrested Hugenay. The owner of the villa was completely horrified to learn that three criminals had been captured on his island. He was also shocked by the damage in his villa—courtesy of Señor Juárez and Pete Crenshaw.

After that, Cotta and Mr Knox had insisted on getting from The Three Investigators a summary of what had happened. Jupiter was very careful not to say anything about his intriguing conversation with Hugenay or the secrets of the painting. When The Three Investigators were finally brought home much later, it was already dawn.

But despite the very short sleep they had, they were off again the very next afternoon. Bob had confidently claimed that he would succeed in retrieving the sunken backpack.

“You still haven’t told me how you’re going to find the spot where Brittany threw the backpack into the sea, Bob,” Jupiter said.

“You still haven’t told us what you found out about the secret of *Fire Moon*,” Bob replied calmly.

“I told you that all Hernández paintings were in fact painted by Jaccard,” Jupiter said.

“Yes,” Pete said. “But you said there was something else, in particular, the reason why Hugenay wanted the painting destroyed. And you wouldn’t tell us.”

“I would rather show you than tell you,” Jupiter said.

“Yeah, sure,” Bob remarked. “Right here. Pull over, Pete!”

Pete stopped the boat. Jupiter looked around. He had suspected that his friends had somehow managed to place a buoy. But there was nothing, only the open sea, which of course looked the same here as two hundred metres to port or half a kilometre to starboard. “So, right here, huh? And what makes you think so, Bob?”

“I’ll show you if you sit exactly where I’m sitting right now,” Bob said and slid to the side in the back seat.

Jupiter sat down. “What now?”

“Now look straight across the tip of the bow towards the shore,” Bob said. “What do you see?”

“The pier at Rocky Beach. So? I would see the same from anywhere as long as the boat is pointed there. That can’t be it.”

“Wait!” Bob said and pointed to the right. “Do you see a notch in the fuselage there? I carved that into the wood last night. Now look straight over it!”

“On the far horizon, I can see the peak of the canyon, that’s probably what you mean, right?” Jupe was beginning to see Bob’s point. He looked to his left and saw another notch in

the fuselage. “And that’s the third mark, right? Looking straight over it, you can see the top of City Hall! Bob! It’s like a three-point fix in sailing! If you sit at exactly this spot and extend your view to these three markings—the two notches and the tip of the bow—there is only one place in the world where this view appears exactly—the peak of the canyon on the right, the pier straight ahead, and City Hall on the left.”

“Port,” Pete corrected him, amused.

“In a way, it’s like an anamorphosis,” Bob said and nodded proudly. “There’s only one specific point where the painting makes sense. It’s all a matter of perspective. So I thought—if we can find this perspective again, then we’ll also have the point where Brittany threw the backpack overboard last night. Of course, the method isn’t super accurate, we’ll probably have to search for a while, but at least—”

“Bob, you’re brilliant!” Jupe said, full of admiration. “I couldn’t have thought of it better! I was interested to see if your marking method would be effective. It was. This is an important experience that could be useful for us in the future. I’m very proud of you!”

“Hear, hear! Big words from the First Investigator!” Bob exclaimed.

“Now that this is settled, can we finally get started?” Pete asked. In the meantime, he had already put on his diving suit and checked the oxygen tanks.

“Of course,” Bob replied. “Do you want to go down alone?”

“Whatever. I can go alone. And I think it’s a fair division of labour—Brittany sinks the backpack, Bob finds the spot again, I dive to get it back. After that, it’s your turn, Jupe. As soon as I retrieve the backpack, we want to know what this big secret you’ve uncovered!” Pete put on his diving goggles, put the breathing apparatus in his mouth, picked up the underwater flashlight and let himself fall backwards overboard.

The water seemed warmer to him than last night, which was not only due to the diving suit. He had the feeling of moving freely and easily and without fear for the first time in weeks. He swam down in powerful strokes and switched the flashlight on after only a few metres. The water here, so close to Los Angeles, was not exactly the cleanest. But the sea was not too deep so close to the coast. Soon Pete had reached the sandy and rocky sea bed. Some fish escaped from the beam of his flashlight. Pete looked around and began to dive in a spiral that grew bigger and bigger. In this way he hoped not to miss anything.

He found a car tyre. He found half a mattress. He found a dozen drink cans and just as many bottles. Then the beam of light hit the backpack. A quarter of it was stuck in the sand. Pete grabbed it and went back up.

“You haven’t found it?” Jupiter said disappointedly when the Second Investigator was back on the surface.

“I found it!” Pete yelled and spat out the breathing apparatus.

“You found it?” cried Bob.

“Yes, I told you so! Now help me, or I’ll drop the thing again!”

Jupiter and Bob immediately rushed to Pete’s aid and together they first lifted the backpack and right after, helped the Second Investigator on board.

“Good work, Pete,” Jupe said.

“Thank you. And now I want to see what’s inside!”

Jupiter nodded at him encouragingly. “Here you go!”

The Second Investigator loosened the cords, opened the backpack and carefully lifted out the object. In his hands, he held the globe of the World Watcher!

15. Jupe Goes Swimming

Bob and Pete marvelled at the globe. It was a bronze sphere, the size of a basketball, and it shimmered mysteriously in the bright light. On it was the continents of the earth standing out as reliefs from the smooth surface.

“Jupe!” Pete said. “Would you tell us where you found this?”

“Sure,” Jupiter replied and cleared his throat. “The whole story from the beginning?”

“We are asking for it,” Pete demanded.

“So, when we were at Brandon Myers’s place in Oxnard, I had the distinct impression that Julianne Wallace was not telling us the truth. When I was changing in the bathroom, I saw her wet jacket hanging there. I searched the pockets and took the remote control that she used to turn off the alarm system in her trailer.

“While you two were heading back to Rocky Beach, I went to Solromar. With your lock picks, I got into her trailer—but this time, I was able to deactivate the alarm. If you remember, after we first broke into her trailer, she went in to check on her things. I followed behind and saw that the first thing she went to was a puny indoor plant in an oversized pot. If she bothered to install an alarm system for her trailer, I suspected that she had something very, very valuable hidden there.”

“The globe of the World Watcher,” Bob surmised.

“Right!” Jupe said, beaming.

“But when you came back to the salvage yard, you were acting so mysteriously!” Bob said. “And then in the evening, you took this backpack from Uncle Titus’s storeroom and protected it like something that is worth its weight in gold! Why didn’t you just tell us that you found the globe?”

“Well, I was going to tell you but we had to go for the light show, so I guess I would do so after that...” Jupe admitted. “Then one thing came after another, and we found ourselves on the boat to Knox Island. By that time, I wasn’t even sure I did the right thing to bring the globe along. So I decided not to say anything in case someone accidentally slips up.”

“There’s always something you’re not telling us,” Bob remarked. “Look, we would have lost this globe had we not chased after Brittany.”

“Talking about Brittany, it turned out well, didn’t it,” Jupe said. “I actually didn’t know if we were really going to run into her. She lied to us from the beginning. Her plan was to eliminate Hugenay and Night Shadow and get to *Fire Moon* herself. But for that, she needed our help. Without us, she would not have been able to solve all the puzzles. Only at the very end did she realize that she had hopelessly overestimated herself, and she decided to disappear as quickly as possible.”

“So much for Brittany, Jupe,” Bob continued. “But don’t you see our point? You always keep things to yourself. How do you expect us to work as a team? Luckily it turned out well this time.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Jupe sighed. “There were so many things going on in my mind last night, and like I said, I wasn’t even sure that I did the right thing bringing the globe along.”

Bob and Pete looked at the First Investigator in silence for seconds.

Then Pete said: "Okay, let's start with the secret of *Fire Moon*. What is this big secret you've uncovered? Tell us about it."

"Sure," Jupe replied sheepishly, but fell silent.

"Well? Tell us now!" Pete insisted.

"Not now, but soon," Jupiter said.

"Wait a minute!" Pete complained. "Does this mean we have to wait longer for the answer to the puzzle?"

"Just a few more hours," Jupiter promised. "Charles Knox called me and asked that we go to his place on the island tonight and tell him exactly what happened."

"Why can't you tell us now?" Bob demanded.

"I've said that I would rather show you than just describe it to you," Jupe replied. "And we need this globe for the grand finale."

"When was the last time you actually went swimming?" Pete asked grimly and stepped threateningly towards Jupiter.

"Wait!" Jupiter warned and raised his hands. "You can't push me into the water. I don't have my swimming gear on!"

"So we'll have to wait a little longer and not push you in the water, is that it?" Pete smirked.

"Yes."

Bob and Pete looked at each other. "What do you think, Bob?"

"Well, if he is not going to tell us anything now..." Bob said, "then... what else can we do?"

"I'm afraid there is only one thing to do," Pete said. "Well?"

"Well... I think it's obvious," Bob said.

Pete nodded seriously. "I agree."

"We have no choice," Bob affirmed.

"So then..." Pete said. "Let's get over with it..."

With wild screams and laughter, they pushed Jupiter into the water. Then Bob steered the boat fifty metres away, and made him swim back that distance.

In the evening, the three of them boarded a small yacht that Charles Knox had sent to bring them to Knox Island. Pete and Bob were still very eager to find out about the secret, but had resigned to the fact that they had to be patient.

On the way there, Jupiter quickly told his two friends some important things—some information that he did not want to reveal to Mr Knox.

"If you remember, in the three letters from Jaccard to Hernández, there was absolutely no indication of where to look for *Fire Moon*—in fact, not in the letters or anywhere else," Jupiter began. "Only Victor Hugenay knew where it was. If we hadn't found the blueprints of Knox Villa, we wouldn't have found the painting either. And *Fire Moon* would have remained a legend.

"However, the globe of the World Watcher was different. There was a reference to it, namely on the tomb of Hernández. 'If you have seen the world, you have already seen a lot, but you only know half the truth.' It is an important element in unravelling the secret of *Fire Moon*."

"According to Mrs Albright, the globe was stolen years ago," Jupe continued. "When, of all sculptures, the World Watcher was placed in the forecourt of the museum, the globe was

in danger of being stolen. Hugenay or someone else could have taken it at any time. Now we know who got to it first—Julianne Wallace.”

“So the globe is for uncovering the secret of the painting,” Pete remarked.

“Yes. It is the proof that Raúl Hernández was in reality not a painter at all, but only played this role for his best friend Jean-Marie Jaccard,” Jupiter said. “As I have told you earlier, all the Hernández paintings—and even sculptures—were actually done by Jaccard.”

Jupiter paused and then said: “There is one more piece of information that has to be handled carefully—the second secret of *Fire Moon*.”

“The second secret?” Pete frowned. “There’s a second secret?”

“That’s what we’re going to unravel in a moment’s time,” Jupiter said.

“We’re here!” Bob interrupted the conversation and pointed to the island that was now right in front of them.

The yacht docked.

16. *Fire Moon*

Charles Knox was already waiting for them at the jetty. He was a small, slightly stocky man with a bald head and glasses, whose expensive, tailor-made suit did its best to hide his belly.

"There you are at last!" he shouted excitedly as The Three Investigators disembarked.

"Mr Knox, thank you letting us come," Jupiter said. "After all the commotion, I think we owe you a more detailed account of what happened leading to the painting that was almost stolen last night."

"My goodness!" Mr Knox exclaimed. "If I'd known that an untitled Hernández painting was worth so much that even a world-famous master thief would want it, I probably wouldn't have bought the painting at the auction. Also, I thought I have made sufficient precautions when I built this villa."

"Indeed you have," Pete agreed. "But the backup generator—"

"The generator should have started!" Mr Knox interjected. "It really should have! It was crazy, because just a week ago, someone from the company was here to do some maintenance!"

"What company was that?" Jupiter wanted to know.

"Well, the event company that I sponsored. They were the ones who created the light show, and set up the spotlights all over Rocky Beach and here on the island. Everything was actually already finished and cabled up, and a man was here to check if the generator was working properly and connected. He tinkered around in the generator building for a while and then left."

Jupiter frowned. "Would that be a very tall, athletic Mexican by any chance?"

"Yes," cried Charles Knox. "That's the one! But how do you know that? Do you know him?"

Jupiter recalled that Night Shadow and Brittany had been taken away by the police before Mr Knox returned to the villa, else he would have recognized the Mexican.

Jupiter laughed softly. "Mr Knox, I know this must all be very confusing for you. I suggest we go inside and tell you the whole story from the beginning!"

The Three Investigators and Charles Knox, spent the rest of the evening in a cosy living room on the ground floor—one of the few rooms that had not been ravaged by Night Shadow. The Three Investigators took turns telling him the whole story. Jupiter had earlier briefed his two friends what they could and could not reveal. The multi-millionaire listened attentively and kneaded his fingers when things got particularly exciting.

It was late when Charles Knox finally had no more questions.

"I can only repeat it once more," Jupiter said in conclusion. "We are extremely sorry about what happened to your house, Mr Knox. We are aware that the damage would probably have been less if we had not intervened last night. But—"

"Nonsense, Jupiter!" Mr Knox interrupted him. "Sure, I was shocked to see this disaster, but... things could have been much worse had you not intervened! The Hernández would have been stolen! ... And the thieves would still be at large. No, no, don't apologize. I thank you for your courage and bravery in saving the Hernández, although I still don't understand

why Victor Hugenay had chosen this particular painting. I mean, it wasn't cheap, yes, but how can I say... it's not a Picasso or Van Gogh or Jaccard."

Pete coughed.

"Goodness! You must have caught a cold when you had to sit on my roof half the night yesterday in this freezing cold! I can't even think about what could have happened there! On the roof, I mean, and if you could have fallen down. Would you like some hot milk? Or a warm lemon juice with honey?"

"No, thanks. I'm fine." Pete said.

"You just have to say it!"

"Mr Knox," Jupiter interrupted the man gently, "I have a request."

"Yes, what, Jupiter? Anything, anytime!" Mr Knox said.

"The three of us would like to take another look at the Hernández."

"Of course! It's hanging in its old place again! Wait, I'll take you upstairs!"

Pete coughed again. "I could use a warm lemon juice after all, Mr Knox... with honey."

"Of course, Pete. No problem," Mr Knox said. "I'll make each of you the same drink. All my housekeepers are off for the anniversary celebrations, so I'll go get some lemons from the garden and prepare the drinks myself. Why not you go on up first? You know the way. I'll be up there soon."

"Perfect, Mr Knox," Jupiter said, beaming.

The Three Investigators hurried up to the second floor. Bob took along the bulging backpack.

"We don't have much time before Mr Knox shows up here," Jupiter said quietly as they entered the gallery room. The painting hung on the wall as if nothing had happened. A halogen spotlight illuminated it brilliantly.

"I still can't believe it," Pete remarked. "This is in fact *Fire Moon*..."

"Even up close, it doesn't look that spectacular," Bob thought.

"After all, it's only one half of the truth," Jupiter replied. "Bob, the globe!"

Bob nodded, put the backpack down, carefully took the globe out and handed it to Jupiter. They had earlier cleaned and carefully polished it to a shine.

"Let's see." Jupiter briefly weighed it in his hands. There was a hole in the South Pole of the globe. That was where it had been attached to the outstretched hand of the World Watcher. The First Investigator rotated the globe with both hands until the hole was at the bottom. "If the globe is fixed back on the World Watcher, the sculpture would have to be placed directly in front of the painting, probably right in the centre."

"Let's try it," Bob said.

On the painting, the coloured spots and stripes appeared distorted. When reflected on the shimmering metallic surface of the globe, the colours remained but they took on different shapes and sizes.

Jupiter took a half step back, but not much changed. Then he took a step forward and the reflections seemed better. Then he experimented by rotating the globe around its north-south axis bit by bit. Slowly the coloured spots and stripes in the reflection shifted to more complex shapes.

It took Jupiter a while to find the right position of the ball. The continents emphasized certain elements and like a puzzle, everything gradually formed one big picture. The colours and shapes had found their place in the reflection... And then the painting finally revealed its secret.

The Hernández painting became *Fire Moon*! The confused lines and blobs of colour turned into eyes... into the shadow of a nose... reflecting light from cheekbones and lips...

and dark hair.

"It's a portrait!" Bob exclaimed softly. "A portrait of a young man! And it's unmistakably a Jaccard painting!"

Fascinated, The Three Investigators stared at the reflection in the sphere. Then to the painting on the wall with its swabs and strokes. Then again at the reflection. The serious eyes of the young man seemed to look directly at them. And he looked strangely familiar to them.

"But this has nothing to do with fire!" Pete remarked.

"Actually, it does have something to do with fire," Jupiter said quietly. "I did some research today. Do you remember that Jaccard had a son? His name is Ignace Chander Jaccard. His first name is French, his second is of Indian origin, as his mother was half-Indian. The name 'Ignace' is derived from the Latin '*ignis*' and it means 'fire'. And 'Chander' in Hindi means 'moon'. Hence, 'fire moon'. This is the name of Jean-Marie Jaccard's son. He painted his son, called the portrait *Fire Moon* and hid it in an anamorphosis."

"Unbelievable," whispered Pete.

Jupiter nodded slowly. "And now take a good look at the portrait of this young man. The eyes, the mouth... Doesn't he look familiar to you?"

For a while, they stared silently at the reflected portrait.

Then Bob suddenly put his hand over his mouth. "Hugenay!" he whispered soundlessly. "That's Victor Hugenay!"

Pete stared stunned at the globe. Then he looked at the anamorphosis again, and now he recognized it too.

"Victor Hugenay!" whispered Pete. "At a young age! Indeed! It's really him! Oh my gosh... But that means..." He broke off.

Jupiter nodded again. "It means that Victor Hugenay is none other than Jean-Marie Jaccard's son!"

17. Hugenay's Secret

It is not always that a multi-millionaire takes upon himself to make drinks for his guests, and he did take some time to do it—enough time for The Three Investigators to finally unravel the secret of *Fire Moon*. In fact, Mr Knox hadn't realized what the three of them had found out. Nor did he ask what Bob was carrying around in his backpack all that time.

The Three Investigators then said goodbye to Charles Knox. They did not say anything about their discovery until they were alone on the multi-millionaire's private yacht. The three of them stood on deck as the bow of the yacht ploughed powerfully through the calm sea, slowly approaching the lights of Rocky Beach. The town looked as usual, as if the wind had blown away the traces of last night.

"I still can't believe it," Pete said repeatedly. "An untitled painting and a sculpture—both credited to Hernández—reveal a painting by Jaccard—a portrait of his son—a famous art thief that is wanted all over the world! This is mind-boggling! Who can really believe this!"

"And yet it explains a lot," Bob added. "Goodness, it explains everything!"

"It explains, for example, why right from the beginning, Victor Hugenay knew where the painting was even though there were no clues," Jupiter said. "And how he managed to steal a genuine Hernández at a young age and give it to Julianne Wallace. He probably simply took it from his father's studio."

"And it is quite certain that hardly anybody knows anything about Hugenay's family," Bob surmised. "Not even Julianne."

"But why?" asked Pete.

"Why what?" Jupiter asked.

"Why... everything? Why does the son of a world-famous painter become an art thief? Why didn't he tell you who he really is? Why did he change his name? Why did he want to destroy the painting?"

"In a way, I can deduce from what Hugenay told me when we spoke at the police department," Jupiter wondered. "He talked about how art was actually worthless—just 'a bit of oil paint on a piece of canvas', nothing more. Now it all makes sense..."

"If it really was the case that Jean-Marie Jaccard was a brilliant painter but not a particularly good father... then it must have been a complete mystery to his son how he could get his heart so attached to oil paint and brushes instead of looking after his own family. In addition, the whole world admired his father for what he did. They admired him as a painter. But Hugenay did not care about his father's paintings. He wanted to be loved by him, as every child wants to be loved by his parents... and praised... and acknowledged. But he didn't get that recognition from him. So he left home as soon as he was old enough and turned his back on his family.

"He changed his name to Victor Hugenay. He borrowed that name, in a way, from a friend. And that friend was Lydia Cartier, who had a 'Victor Hugenay' in her family. That was what we found out in the Poltergeist case. So of course we thought that they were related to each other. I was very surprised when Julianne Wallace told us that Lydia Cartier was only a friend of Hugenay, but not a relative. But now it makes sense. Probably the young Ignace

Chander Jaccard stood one day in front of Lydia Cartier's family tree, discovered the name 'Victor Hugenay' there and chose it as the new name for his future life.

"From Ignace Chander—'fire moon', to Victor—Latin for 'winner'... That suits him, because he has won. Many times, in fact. And he's got the recognition he wanted. People revered him as a master thief."

Jupiter remained thoughtfully silent as he looked out over the lights of Rocky Beach.

"Then his father's last letters to his friend Hernández were discovered," Bob finally continued. "And, fearing that the letters might contain clues to his identity, Hugenay had them stolen. But that was not enough for him. He wanted to destroy the only proof of who he really was—*Fire Moon* and the globe of the World Watcher—two parts of the secret, and you need to put both together to reveal the truth. So Hugenay had to destroy them—at least one, if not both. Since he could not get the globe, he just need to destroy the painting."

"He had spent decades building a new identity for himself, and now the past was threatening to catch up with him. He was determined to stop it at any cost," Jupiter added.

"But why?" Pete asked one more time.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe he had learned by now that it wasn't necessarily the best path he had chosen for his life. He didn't want his name, Victor Hugenay, to become a muddy name in retrospect. Because despite everything, Victor loved his father, as any child does.

"And Jaccard also loved his son," Jupiter continued. "In one of the letters, Jaccard confided to his friend how much he regretted not having been a good father and that Victor—or Ignace—had distanced himself from him. Hugenay read the letters... and perhaps it has reconciled him a little with his father."

"So now what about Julianne Wallace?" Pete asked. "She has known Hugenay since he was young and has been chasing the painting for so long. Would you reveal this information to her?"

"Absolutely not," Jupiter said. "I did give this a thought but nothing doing. First and foremost, Hugenay asked me to keep his secret. I promised and I intend to keep it. Secondly, he did express his doubt that Julianne could make the same promise as I did. He knows her better than I do. If you recall, Julianne claimed that she is working on a book. If that is true, she would be tempted to reveal the secret. How famous would she get?

"In any case, if this gets out to the world, do you realize what the consequences could be? The anamorphosis will be printed everywhere. And around the same time, Victor Hugenay's photo will probably be in the press. Sooner or later someone will notice the striking similarity between Jaccard's son in the painting and Hugenay, and his secret will be revealed.

"I have a bad feeling about this. It could cause a sensational reaction everywhere. The question is, for what? All owners of an original Hernández would rub their hands because they suddenly have an original Jaccard hanging on the wall. These paintings will suddenly increase in price many times over! And the press would jump on the subject and tear Hugenay apart. And whatever he did, I don't think he deserved it.

"I have long said that despite Victor Hugenay being a criminal, he is a gentleman. He has his principles. In our previous dealings with him, we know that he did not resort to violence. If he goes to prison, it will be as a master thief, whom everyone feared a little, but admired at the same time. He can sit in his cell smiling, knowing that he had given the police all over the world a good hunt for years. It is a... dignified exit... somehow. But when the whole world is digging into his family history, into his past, and tearing everything apart in every detail... there is nothing dignified about it."

Pete nodded in agreement. "It would be disgusting."

Bob also agreed.

“We have to be very, very careful with information like that,” Jupiter concluded. “As far as last night’s attempted robbery was concerned, it was for an untitled Hernández painting. So we’ll just leave things as it is...”

18. Just Like Old Times

Rocky Beach was exactly two hundred years and one week old when El Niño finally gave up and the sun returned to California. Within two days, the temperature rose back to normal and people streamed out as if they hadn't seen the sun for years.

What also returned was Headquarters. Jupiter had gone with Uncle Titus in his pickup truck to pull the battered mobile home trailer back to the salvage yard. Pete had also got his MG repaired for a second time in as many weeks.

Meanwhile, The Three Investigators had returned the globe to Hernández House. They had sent it by post anonymously. Nobody needed to know who stole it or who returned it. In fact, Julianne Wallace would know, but she would not dare accuse Jupiter for taking back the globe without revealing that she stole it in the first place. In any case, she could not lay claim to its ownership. To close things off, Jupiter left her remote control in her trailer after he made off with the globe.

A few days after sending back the globe, The Three Investigators went past the outside of Hernández House, but did not enter the building. They could see that the World Watcher had been removed from the forecourt, presumably moved back inside the museum. They hoped that the globe was restored back securely onto Otto's hand, and that nobody would ever take it away from him again.

Other than that, The Three Investigators had spent every spare minute repairing their trailer. It had looked hopeless. The many cracks and dents seemed irreparable at first—not to mention the destroyed interior. But thanks to the active support of Uncle Titus and the catering of cherry cake and orange juice from Aunt Mathilda, they had finally succeeded in getting Headquarters back in shape. It was back in its old place and almost looked better than before. Almost...

Jupiter, Pete and Bob stood contentedly in front of Headquarters, which glowed in the sun as it had not done for a long time, when footsteps approached from behind.

"I thought your headquarters is gone!"

The three of them turned around.

"Inspector Cotta!" cried Pete in surprise. "This is a rare visit!"

"It's my day off today and I thought I'd stop by," the inspector replied, almost looking a little embarrassed.

"Your day off?" Jupiter asked. "Already?"

"Yes, the first in weeks! But slowly, the waves are smoothing out. I am finally off the Victor Hugenay case. Interpol is now handling the matter. There will soon be a proper trial for him, but then it won't be up to me. Thank goodness!"

"Oh," Jupiter said in surprise. "I thought you were determined to keep the case!"

"Well, to be honest..." The inspector didn't quite know where to look. He decided to continue staring at Headquarters, when he said: "To be honest, I want to apologize to you three. At the time when Hugenay was still in custody with us... well, I was a bit overwhelmed... and stressed... and very, very unkind to you... not to mention unfair. I am sorry."

The Three Investigators threw surprised looks at each other. They had never seen Cotta like that before.

"Well," Pete finally said. "Well, it wasn't that bad."

"Nice of you, Pete. But I've really reached my limit with this case."

"Not only you," said Jupiter. "But what about the promotion?"

"I was offered one," Cotta said. "But I refused."

"Refused?" Bob asked. "But why?"

"Well, the pay would be better, but honestly, it's too much red tape for me. I'd still have to deal with Mr Hugenay," Cotta explained. "I'm done. I'd rather stay an inspector, and besides..." He smiled. "Besides, someone else would have to attend to your panic calls when somewhere is on fire and someone needs to bail you out from time to time."

"And of course you wouldn't want to give that up," said Jupiter with a confident smile.

"Wrong, Jupiter Jones. I wouldn't want to put anyone through that!" He smiled.

"What's going to happen to Señor Juárez?" Bob asked.

"He'll also be tried and probably go away for several years, as he has much to answer for."

"And, uh, Brittany?" Jupiter asked.

"To be honest, I don't know. She's got herself into quite a mess. On the other hand, the offences are not particularly serious. It's difficult to tell whether she'll go to prison or get away with a fine. We'll see."

"Inspector!" cried Aunt Mathilda suddenly across the yard. She left the customer she had just served and came running across. "How kind of you to drop by! Do you want to give my nephew and his friends a good tongue-lashing? Please do. I think that would be very appropriate given the mess they keep getting themselves into!"

"Well, uh, actually... I just wanted to have a look around the salvage yard," Cotta said, slightly overwhelmed.

"Oh, really?" Aunt Mathilda's eyes started to glow. She smelled a sale. "Then look around you... or shall I show you around? I'd be honoured. What are you looking for? I'm sure you'll find whatever you're looking for here! We have everything." She got in with the inspector and pulled him away from The Three Investigators.

Jupe, Pete and Bob could hardly suppress their laughter.

"Oh, uh, Jupiter!" Cotta said and broke free. "I almost forgot! I'm supposed to give you this!" He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled out an envelope. Jupiter accepted it. Then Aunt Mathilda caught Cotta again and pulled him away.

"Poor guy," Pete said laughing. "Your Aunt Mathilda won't let him go until he's bought a bedside lamp, a fridge, a toilet seat, a bottle cap collection and two boxes of books!"

"Who sent you the letter?" Bob asked curiously,

"We'll soon know," Jupiter said as he opened the envelope and unfolded the letter. He recognized Victor Hugenay's handwriting immediately.

Dear Jupiter,

As I have not heard any scandalous stories so far, I assume that you've kept your promise. Thank you.

I don't know if we'll ever see each other again, but I'd like that opportunity. After all, I wouldn't want to spend so much of my life following the path of a boy who is absolutely brilliant. Either way, if we meet again, then that encounter will surely take place under different circumstances than the previous times. That is my promise.

Give my regards to your brave friends, Pete and Bob! Next to your courage, your intelligence and your loyalty—they are your greatest strength.

Victor Hugenay

The Three Investigators had just finished reading the letter when a deafening horn made them turn around.

A huge dark green dump truck rolled up the driveway into the salvage yard. It was loaded with scrap metal up to the top. “Oh, no! Here it comes again!” Jupiter groaned. “Come on, fellas, I think Uncle Titus needs help!”

The Three Investigators rushed to the truck... and Uncle Titus was already on his way.

“You again!” cried Titus Jones in indignation. “Haven’t I told you a thousand times—”

The driver’s door opened and a man got out. But it was not the grumpy driver from last time, but a man in a black suit, whom The Three Investigators had never seen before.

Uncle Titus froze. “Mr Barker!”

“From Barker Scrap Metal?” Jupiter exclaimed in surprise.

“That’s right,” the man said angrily. “Mr Barker of Barker Scrap Metal. I’m coming here in person today, Mr Jones, after you’ve sent my driver away two times! What are you thinking?”

“Mr Barker,” Uncle Titus said sheepishly. “I... I can explain!”

“Titus Jones!” Aunt Mathilda called out and hurried to her husband. “What’s going on?”

Inspector Cotta took advantage of the opportunity and left as quickly as possible.

“I’d like to know that too,” Jupiter said.

“I can tell you that, ma’am,” replied Mr Barker. “Your husband and I have an agreement. He bought a bunch of junk from me a few months ago—at a very, very good price, I might add. However in return, he has agreed to take all my junk—those that I can’t use any more—this load right here.”

Aunt Mathilda stared with open mouth at the dump truck monster. “Excuse me?”

“That’s the way it was. But since then, Mr Titus Jones refuses to accept this consignment of scrap metal! He kept sending my driver away! And he hasn’t answered any of my calls! He has—”

“Is this true, Titus Jones?” Aunt Mathilda hissed at her husband.

Uncle Titus nodded silently. “Yes. I... I didn’t think there was so much scrap metal! And the things back then... Mathilda, you remember those beautiful old china dishes and the picture frames and the old chairs and—”

“A fine mess you got yourself into...” Aunt Mathilda remarked.

“But I wanted those items, so I... agreed to the deal.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Aunt Mathilda burst out.

“Listen, Mrs Jones,” Mr Barker meddled in the conversation again. “I have neither the time nor the inclination to attend to your domestic disagreements. Just tell me where to unload this stuff.”

“Unload? Here? Nowhere!” Mathilda exclaimed. “We have no place! You can see that! The yard is packed to the rafters.”

“Pardon me, ma’am, but frankly, I couldn’t care less. There’s an agreement between us!”

“Fellas,” Jupiter whispered and pulled Pete and Bob away from the commotion. “I’ve just had an idea.”

“How are we gonna get Uncle Titus out of this?” Bob asked.

“If we can help him, I’m in!” Pete agreed.

"I don't really know if you guys are okay with this. But I thought... well... our trailer was once hidden under a pile of junk. And when I think back on it, those were actually the better times for us. Nobody knew about our headquarters. There were no break-ins, no thefts... and most importantly, no Aunt Mathilda who knew where we were at all times."

Pete and Bob stared at Jupe with wide eyes. "You... you mean..." Bob began.

"Yes!" cried Pete. "Jupe, I think this is a great idea! Not only because of Aunt Mathilda, not because of the burglaries, but because it would ensure that this trailer would never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never move from this spot again!" He nodded enthusiastically.

"We would, of course, need new secret entrances and so on," Jupe said.

"Let's do it," Pete said with wild determination.

"Bob? What do you think?" Jupe asked.

"I agree with Pete seven million percent," Bob said.

The Three Investigators returned to Uncle Titus, Aunt Mathilda and Mr Barker, who were still arguing.

"Excuse me, Mr Barker, we have a proposal that should satisfy all parties."

"Really? I can't wait to hear it!"

Jupiter presented his idea. Mr Barker was pleased. Uncle Titus was incredulous, but relieved. Aunt Mathilda was horrified, but speechless.

Five minutes later, with a tremendous roar, Headquarters was buried forever under a huge mountain of scrap metal.

When the dust had settled, there was no sign of Headquarters from the outside. It was just like old times. And The Three Investigators were happy and relieved as never before in their lives.